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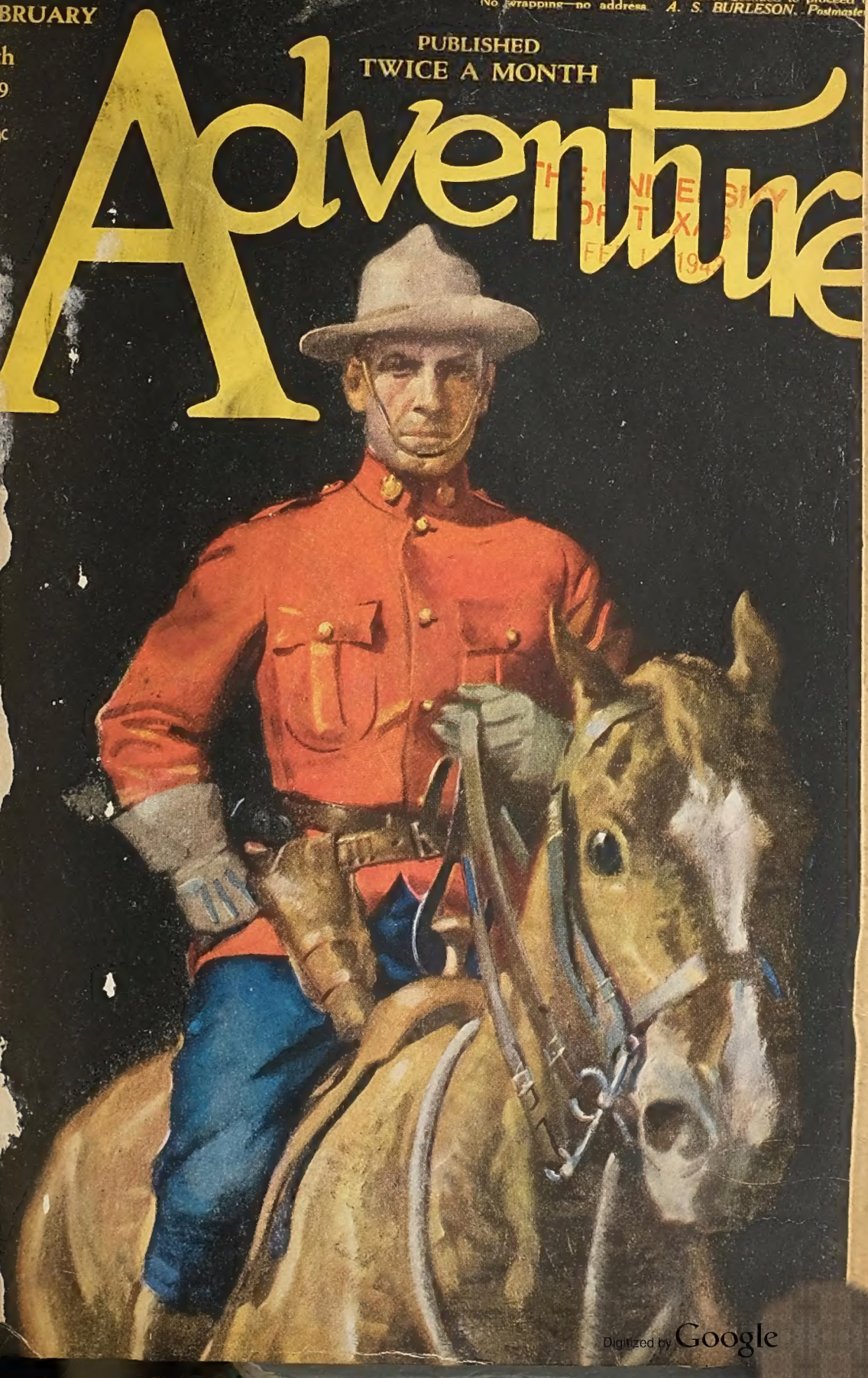

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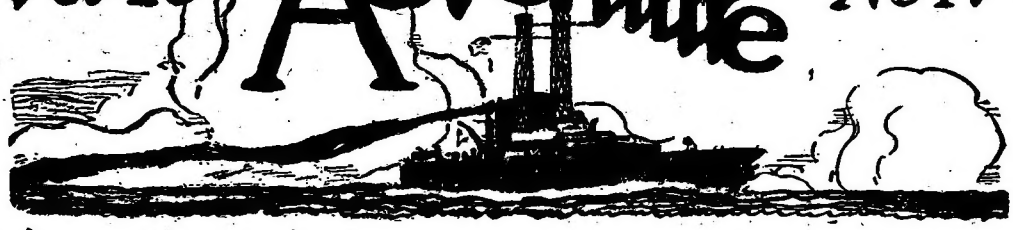

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THE TWO-GUN GIRL

A Complete Novelette

By ROBERT V. CARR

Another tale of adventure in the Great American Desert by the author of *"The Survivor."*

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By S. B. H. HURST

A bit of human flotsam drifting in the South Seas—and the emergency he bumps into.

LEETE PROTESTS

A Complete Novelette

By RUSSELL A. BOGGS

Every-day life and adventure well mixed in a railroad story.

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FIRST MARCH ISSUE

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THE UNIVERSITY
OF TEXAS

Adventure

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VOLUME~20
NUMBER~IV
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Go-ahead Davie

A Complete Novel

by Hugh Pendexter

CHAPTER I

THE MAN FROM THE CANE

IN THE early Fall of 1822 the western frontier of Tennessee tempted only the bold of heart. Some ten years before a great earthquake* inflicted terrible punishment on the lonely region. In correcting a subterranean fault old earth had found it necessary to disturb violently the whole Mississippi Valley, and western Tennessee came in for a scourging and a rending which left the land a grotesque jumble of abysses, prostrated forests and impenetrable bush-growths. Terrific hurricanes followed the earthquake, sweeping flat more giant trees, and left large areas along the Obion River a scene of chaos and devil's play.

This folding up and ripping apart of the earth's surface was believed by the Indians, sole proprietors of the country, to be the prank of a mighty and an evil spirit. The Indians fled. As a natural result game increased in the desolated region until it became a paradise for hunters. With scarcely any human inhabitants to check their multiplication, panthers, bears, wolves, elk and deer, besides the smaller species of game, found an ideal range. Never was such a country for concealment and ambush.

And yet one son of Tennessee, one whose name was to become a household word to every American, traveled a hundred and fifty miles through the dense tangle and found the silent Obion fair to look upon and possessing all the requisites dear to the backwoodsman. His cabin was erected by the river, the site being an elevation high enough to escape the freshets and near a small meadow clear of trees, where the corn

*1811-13. Known as the New Madrid Earthquake. Most severe at junction of Ohio and Mississippi. First shocks most violent. Disturbances continued at intervals for two years.

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"crap" could be planted. With game at the very cabin door, and with the Winter's bread thriving in the shape of golden ears, Davie Crockett found the world very satisfactory as he leaned his six feet of brawn and muscle against the door-frame and threw back his long black hair and allowed his dark eyes to sweep over the desolate vista.

Something moved in the dense underbrush near by, and the hunter's buckskin-clad arm reached inside the door and brought forth a rifle. The gun was replaced as a dog barked and wriggled into view. Behind the dog came a young man, scarcely more than a boy, who carried a rifle and a brace of turkeys.

"Abe, we've got enough of that collateral to feed the whole Tennessee Legislature for a whole session," humorously greeted Crockett. "You didn't see no varments?"

"The dawg took on after a b'ar. Holed him up under a licking big bunch of red cedars. But I 'lowed turkeys was my stent and left him for Colonel Crockett to fuss with."

Davie's eyes glistened. During the last two weeks he had killed and skinned fifteen bears, and had "salted up" enough meat to last a small settlement throughout the Winter. But, like a dog pursuing his thousandth rabbit, the lust of the chase began to creep over him.

"If you go, Colonel, you'll go it alone," warned the young man, reading the backwoodsman's thoughts. "I've jest got 'nough of ploughing through that harricane."

A windfall caused by a hurricane was a "harricane" in the backwoods dialect.

"Abe Henry, when I pegged down that last scaffolding for to salt up the fifteenth critter on I told you I'd got enough." Then regretfully and registering his struggle with temptation, "Probably this is a mighty big bear. But I've said I had enough and I'll stick to it. I don't ask no favors of a bear except to want him to be polite. But I've got enough bears. I got enough of politics when they sent me to the Legislature. Now you stick 'long here while I do a little traveling. I sha'n't be gone more'n six or seven days."

Young Henry scowled in disappointment as he watched Crockett sling over his right shoulder a pouch of raccoon-skin and attach to it a sheath holding a long butcher-knife.

"Thought we was going back to fetch your fambly in," he reminded.

"So we be, but as we're immortal beings, according to the preacher, there ain't no rush. First I've got to find out what that smoke means I seen the day I crossed the high ridge back east."

"Jackson," suggested Henry.

"Jackson your gran'mother! Not if my name's Davie Crockett. Jackson is forty miles from here. That smoke ain't more'n twenty. Looks like we had some new neighbors. Smoke was too steady for a camp-fire. And the jug's empty. At two coon-skins a quart a two-gallon jug of the creature will call for sixteen pelts."

He counted a small bale of skins and slung them over his back. Then taking his rifle—"Old Betsy" he invariably called it—he admonished:

"Keep the dog close. I'll be back in six days. That is, unless I find company that's rip-roarous. In that case I might be gone nine days, maybe; 'lowing a day 'n' a half to get up-steam and a day 'n' a half to work it off. But you just stick to the cabin tighter'n a wax plaster."

With this final advice he swung with springy step down the slope and entered the tangled forest.

Rough men for rough country. Hothouse plants die in a field of thistles. Crockett was a product of his environment. His strength of mind was unusual, his memory was miraculous. Often flamboyant in speech and given to whimsical exaggerations, he always spoke fresh from the heart; and already he was known throughout the State as a man who could not be bought, bribed nor bullied.

With only six months of schooling to prepare him for his amazing career his shrewd wit and sturdy independence already had made him a marked man. Nor was he to lose his reputation for uprightness although now sequestered in the inaccessible wilds of the Obion.

"Be sure you're right, then go ahead," was his daily motto. Both friend and foe conceded that he lived unswervingly by this rule. In a time when only the most strenuous lives could defeat the obstacles of the western country he stood apart from his fellows as a hunter and as a man. A

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term in the State Legislature had awakened new ambitions in his soul. Then came a freshet that swept away his mill. His wife had said—

"Pay every bit's worth you owe if it takes everything we've got, and we can scuffle for more."

It was characteristic of him to do so without urging. And being practically penniless after paying his debts in southern Tennessee he had taken a pack-horse and accompanied by young Abraham Henry had pushed through the pathless wilds until the Obion country struck his fancy. Now the new smoke must be investigated before he returned for his family.

Thirty miles up the Obion—by land, nearly a hundred by water—was a trading-post at McLemone's Bluff. Seven miles up the river was Neighbor Owens' cabin, but the strange smoke was half-way to Jackson, a thriving village in Madison County, and not on the river. Crockett knew his new neighbor could not have failed to bring in a generous supply of whisky. If men drank freely in those formative days of the new republic, so did they live hard, asking no odds and displaying a self-dependency never surpassed, if equaled, in the building of a nation.

Crockett was well content with himself and his prospects as he worked his way through the brush and crawled under or over the jumble of tops and roots. He had a home and corn for the Winter. Old Betsy never failed to provide a choice menu of game. His ten or a dozen dogs would lead him to a bear any time he willed. The pelts furnished coverings for his bed and an auger and some saplings quickly provided the bed itself. The floor of the cabin awaited him on his arrival—hard-packed earth. By Spring he would have enough furs to trade for a year's supply of sugar, coffee, lead, salt, powder and whisky. With food, shelter and clothing assured he could not imagine anything a man would need, provided he be no man's tool nor wore the collar of any political party.

The national Congress and the adulation of Eastern States had yet to dull his boyish zest for hunting bears. It is true he had resented a legislator's facetiousness in dubbing him "the gentleman from the cane;" not that he was ashamed of living in the cane-brake, but because it was meant as an insult. Davie Crockett was the last man on earth for one to take unwholesome liberties with.

Altogether his lot, compared by the backwoods standard, was a happy one. He had a devoted wife and beautiful children. He possessed the craft to provide for them. There were minor irritations at times; such as the lack of whisky, or a dearth of powder for the firing of "Christmas guns." None of this is meant to imply that Crockett was a "hard drinker" according to the modern viewpoint. Quite the contrary. He drank, as did all his neighbors regardless of their calling, and often including the cloth, in the sense of jollification.

Backwoodsmen passed many days in solitude, battling with the severest hardships. When a few kindred spirits did come together there was but one vehicle for celebrating the event—whisky. And so rugged were their lives, so hardened were they by constant outdoors activities, the liquor they consumed did not register with the effect it did on the dweller along paved streets. So Crockett with his two-gallon jug and his bale of coonskin went forth to find the "creature" with the same innocence and joyous uplift that sends a youngster a-fishing.

HE HAD covered some fifteen miles when the delighted barking of a dog brought him to a halt, first scowling angrily, then laughing boyishly.

"I'll be shot if ain't old Tige!" he told himself with a broad grin. "Abe 'lowed to keep him to home. Come here, you old skunk!"

Knowing he was forgiven, old Tige, the veteran of many a bear hunt, burst through the underbush and leaped high to bestow caresses on his master. Crockett put down the jug and rifle and played boisterously with him for a few minutes before resuming his way. The dog plunged into the thicket and soon called for his master to come and investigate a trail.

Crockett imperiously whistled him back. The dog protested and clamorously insisted the trail was fresh, that the quarry was but a short distance ahead. Crockett remained firm. The dog dolefully demurred, and swore by all the canines his master had ever owned that it was a bear, slow of gait because of his fat.

Crockett pursed his lips to terminate the

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argument, then hesitated and rubbed his nose.

"I don't need that bear," he mused. "No chance that he'll weigh up to the six-hundred-pounder I salted last week. Still, you never can tell, as old Johnson said when the robbers gagged him. Is he a big one, Tige?"

With frantic assurances that the bear was a monster the dog commenced jumping back and forth.

"All right, boy. But if you've lied to me I'll larrup your old hide," surrendered Crockett, breaking a sapling over the jug to mark the spot and taking after the dog.

Tige led the way to a small creek, thick with cane. Crockett crashed through this for some distance and found the dog dancing 'round a large black oak. A glance showed him the marks of the bear ascending, easily told as the claws had slipped none. But on the other side were long scratches, where the animal had come down.

"You dog-gone fool pup! Lay on that trail," growled Crockett, bowling the dog over with a lift of his foot.

Whimpering apologetically the dog obeyed and led the way to a big poplar. The bear, very fat, was perched in the crotch of this. Crockett fired and the bear dropped. Tige rushed in and with a howl flew back. Wounded, but not enough to weaken his fighting prowess the bear lumbered into the bush and fell into a crevice left by the earthquake. Crockett reloaded Old Betsy and forced his way through the tangle with the dog ahead.

"My name ain't Davie Crockett if Tige ain't tackled the biting end!" he exclaimed as the dog yelped in pain.

Pushing aside the brush Crockett threw a leg over a log and with much exertion drew the other after him, lost his balance and fell on the haunches of the bear. The brute, maddened by this unexpected assault, managed to extricate his fore quarters and rear. Crockett gave a sharp order and his intelligent ally realizing the danger jumped into the crack ahead of the bear and proceeded to keep him busy. Regaining his balance Crockett pulled out his knife, rested his hand on the brute's shoulder for a moment, and then gave him his quietus through the heart.

Panting and perspiring he crawled from the crevice and stared ruefully at the bear, half in and half out the trap.

"Tige, a bear in that position ain't worth notice, as old Johnson said of the devil," he wrathfully complained. "You oughter be ashamed to drive a bear into a hole like that. How be I to get him out of his jacket? You oughter be larruped."

As his gaze more completely took in the huge dimensions of the victim the chagrin vanished and he whistled approvingly. He judged it to be a bigger bear than the six-hundred-pound one. He trimmed a sapling and rigged it so as to prevent the huge bulk from toppling forward into the crack and next secured a larger timber to be used as a lever. It was characteristic of him to remain there until he had dislodged and skinned the animal regardless of time. It was early evening and very dark when he finished and rolled up the pelt and slung it over his shoulder.

"After this, Tige, you leave bears alone. There's more'n six hundred pounds of good bear meat gone to waste just along of your dog foolishness," he rebuked as he commenced groping his way to where his instinctive sense of location told him he would find the jug.

ALL the hardships of the day were forgotten as Crockett halted and surveyed the new cabin, and listened to the welcome sounds of men's voices, raised in merry-making. The cabin was a long substantial structure, and the hunter knew it must be a new trading-post. A born raconteur himself he knew the party within was sure to be congenial.

"Abraham Henry, I 'low we'll have to stretch that six days a trifle," he mused. "Keep shet, Tige. There's no devil if I chase after any more bear for the next week."

The dog persisted and with a strange note of pleading that puzzled Crockett. Tige had long since grown to ignore any game other than bear. His master would have given him attention if not for the laughter pouring through the windowless openings in the cabin. The dog, finally despairing, raised his voice in a long drawn-out howl. The door of the cabin flew open and a man holding a rifle was outlined against the light.

"Who comes? If honest, show yourself. I'll shoot in two jiffies," came the warning.

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"Then I'll step nearer so's you can see what to shoot at," drawled Crockett. "And I'll be shot and skinned if I ain't as honest as you be."

With that he advanced into the light streaming through the door.

"A man toting a jug can't be very wicked. Come in," invited the man, backing into the room.

With a word for the dog to remain outside Crockett entered. Three men were seated 'round a rough table at one end of the room, and on the table were drinking-mugs, while a ten-gallon jug on the floor gave promise of an inexhaustible supply. With a sweeping glance Crockett quickly inventoried the trio and the man who had acted as host. The last was dressed in plain homespun and was short and powerfully built. His high cheek-bones, suggesting Indian blood very strongly, went oddly with light-colored hair, a florid complexion and pale gray eyes.

Two of the men at the table wore travel-stained deerskin garments and carried heavy knives at their belts. The fourth and most striking figure was that of a young man, garbed after the fashion of the settlements, an exquisite according to backwoods standards. The quartet stared curiously at Crockett, but relaxed on noting the jug in his left hand.

The absence of a spontaneous welcome irritated the hunter. He was used to royal hospitality and a boisterous greeting wherever he went. The youngest of the group, obviously a planter, was the first to speak, and his words reflected the political trend of the day when he loudly cried:

"Hurrah for Adams! Hurrah for our next President!"

"Hurrah for —— and praise your own country!" yelled Crockett. "I'm hooting for Old Hickory, our next President. Every true son of Tennessee will vote for Andy Jackson, the man from the people, who don't let no party tell him to gee-whoa-haw."*

The three men at the table rose to their feet. The man who had greeted Crockett at the door truculently demanded—

"Who might you be to come a-helling in out the brush this time of night and giving yourself political airs?"

"I might be the devil," retorted Crockett. "But I ain't. I'm Davie Crockett, fresh from the woods and the cane along the Obion, half horse, half alligator, with a little touch of the snapping-turtle. I've waded the Mississippi and jumped the Ohio, and can slip down a honey-locust without nary a scratch. I can whip my weight in wild-cats, and for a gallon of whisky any gentleman can throw in a panther. On my way here I stopped and hugged a bear to death; and I'll eat any man that says a word against General Jackson."

This astounding speech left the four men stupefied for a moment; then they rushed forward, but not to resent the bear-hunter's exaggerated defiance; rather, to extend the warm hand of fellowship. The man in homespun was the first to secure Crockett's hand.

"Davie Crockett! The man from the cane!" exclaimed Homespun. "Lawd! But I'm tickled to press your flesh. I'm George Skow. Just built this post. I'm going to do some trading now the Injuns are coming back and the boatmen are making trips up the Obion. Lawd! But this is a sight for sore eyes! Here, meet my friends. Your friends, too. This is Jim Macon, smartest planter in old Tennessee. Has a mighty fine property a few miles out of Jackson."

The young man who had proclaimed his loyalty to John Quincy Adams, eagerly declared:

"Politics aside, Colonel. I've heard a heap about you and I'm mighty well pleased to see you."

"This is Turner Hicks, and this is Hank Melver, number one woodsmen and hunters, who are going to work for me."

"Gentlemen, I'm as pleased as a boy with a new gun," said Crockett, leaning Old Betsy in the corner. "I 'lowed at first when I come in that we was well into the Winter from the chill in the air."

"Don't remember that, " begged Skow, bustling to the other end of the room and passing into the kitchen. "Forget all about that," he urged, reappearing with a platter of venison and wild turkey. "Draw up to the table, Colonel, and pitch in. You see we don't know this region like you do, and we've heard some strange yarns lately, and have to be careful of strangers.

*Crockett went to Congress in 1827 as a Jackson man. He was reelected by an overwhelming majority in 1829. He was defeated the third time because he had voted against Jackson's Indian bill. Two years later he was returned to Congress, a national figure. Following his triumphal tour of the North and East in 1834 he was again defeated, because of his refusal to accept Jackson's policies. It was the final defeat which incited him to go to Texas, where he was killed in the Alamo.

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But, Lawdy! Who ain't heard of Colonel Crockett! I'm highly honored, Colonel. I see you dropped a jug just inside the door; I only wish it was a bigger one!"

"Colonel Crockett's name is known beyond Tennessee," added young Macon.

"Every cabin knows it in Alabam!" grunted Hicks.

"Now, that's handsome of you, gentlemen," said Crockett, all his first resentment at their aloofness vanishing. "I didn't go for to speak nasty, although I do opine General Jackson is the man in the South today. Not because he's a hero, or Old Hickory, or a mighty handy Injun-fighter. But because he's home folks and has got the guts to go ahead when he knows he's right. I see this smoke some days ago. Early this morning I found I was out of the creature."

And he winked whimsically at the jug.

"When I run for the Legislature I got in the habit of always going loaded. Had these two big pockets put in my hunting-shirt a purpose. One's for a big bottle, t'other's for twist plug. When I meet a man he always wants a drink. He mayn't be particular about his vote, but he's always keen for his drink. And I've noticed he always throws away his quid to liquidate. After he's poured down his'n, I fetch out the twist and give him a fresh chaw. I never 'low to leave a man worse'n I found him."

These remarks were greeted uproariously, young Macon finding a special delight in the speaker. As Crockett seated himself and hungrily attacked the cold meat the planter took a position opposite him and studied him with deep homage in his gaze.

"Colonel, you must come down to my plantation and stay with me. Stay all your life. Bring all your friends and family," he warmly invited. "I've heard so much about you I've always felt it that I'd never seen you. But I thought you was living down in the New Purchase."

"Shoal Crick. Wife and children there now. Lost my mill by freshet. Cost me three thousand dollars. Had to sell my slaves to square my debts. Coming to live on the Obion, starting in all over, as old Johnson said when he fell into the crick," explained Crockett between huge mouthfuls, his gaze kindling as Skow poured a round of mugs from the big jug.

"Friends, let's licker to this —— pleasant meeting," called Skow.

With much gusto the raw draft was tossed off. Melver inquired—

"Ain't quit legislating, have you?"

Crockett frowned, then laughed.

"When I lost my mill and folks tried to pity me, I told them to go to ——, but that I was going to the Obion. Legislating calls for votes, and there ain't many in this neck of the woods."

"Nonsense, Colonel!" protested Skow, "If you lived alone on a deserted island you could round up enough votes to put you anywhere you want to go."

CROCKETT'S eyes flashed, his early political ambitions flaring up. Then with a resolute shake of his black mane he replied:

"I don't 'low to cut any figger in politics. I'm clean busted. I'll have my hands full humping for my family. Dod-blame that dog!"

The last as old Tige obtruded on the conversation with a most doleful howl. Crockett pushed back from the table and went to the door.

"If you don't know how to behave among gentlemen you can just git," he told the dog, the toe of his moccasin accelerating Tige's departure. Returning to his new friends he apologized:

"We stopped and killed a bear back along and that critter's got the fool notion I ain't nothing to do on earth but hunt bears. If I went to the Legislature again I 'low my dogs would die of disgust. That roll of coon-skins is for two gallons, if you can spare it. Now, every man in turn must tell a story."

This was hilariously agreed to, young Macon alone failing to enter into the jovial spirit of the night.

"It's one of my slaves, Bull," he explained to Crockett, "stolen from my plantation. I tracked him for a dozen or fifteen miles, then lost the trail. Rather the dogs lost the trail—if they ever had it—and I sent them back home and pressed on to visit friend Skow."

"And if you stayed a lifetime I could never make up for the good times you give me at your place," warmly declared Skow.

"You say stolen. You don't look like a hard master, yet how do you know he didn't cut and run?" queried Crockett.

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"I say he run away," spoke up Melver.

"I ain't no doubt about it," added Hicks. "He'll find him hiding in the cane within ten miles of the plantation."

"Not by a jugful!" Skow disagreed. "You fellers never stopped with Macon. I have. I know you couldn't drive one of his niggers off the place with a gun."

"Thank you, George," said Macon. "It's true that I treat my boys well. Why shouldn't I? They like me and I like them. There's never been any whipping on my plantation. If one cuts up rough I just let on I'm going to sell the offender down-river, and he's always good after that. No; Bull didn't quit me. He was decoyed away. Some five or six miles from the field where he was working I found signs of a struggle. He'd gone willingly that far, then got suspicious and put up a fight. He was stolen."

"Well, let's licker," suggested Crockett, fearing lest the gaiety of the night was menaced. "Stealing slaves makes one think of Murel, and he ain't been in these parts for years."

"But they say that 'Potter Dick,' one of his old hands, has been active in Alabam', near the Tennessee line," moodily remarked Macon. "My foreman opines he's got some of the old gang at work again and that they're hiding up in the cane on the Arkansas side, just as Murel used to do."

"Murel and Potter Dick are bad names to fling 'round promisc'us," uneasily reminded Skow. "Even if he ain't within a thousand miles of you, you can't be sure but what some of his spies are hanging 'round. Hear that —— dog! What the devil's got into him?"

Crockett jumped to his feet and growled: "Old Tige caught the devil, or got caught himself, I can't figger out what's got into that fool pup, 'less he 'lows I'll be tempted to run for the Legislature again if I stick here. I'll give him his needings and be back in a minute."

With that he snatched up Old Betsy and darted through the door.

The hunter's anger at the dog's behavior quickly passed as he gained the edge of the clearing and listened more attentively to the hound's voice. The hunter could decode his faithful friend's attempts at conversation, and now realized it was no bear Tige was worried about. Yet it was some kind of game that worked the scarred veteran up to a furious pitch of rage and fear. The dog heard his master blundering through the brush, and ceased his growling and howling long enough to yelp with joy. Then he resumed his furious clamor.

The hunter gathered a double handful of dry brush and twisted it into a torch. Tige crashed through the undergrowth, and with much staccato barking leaped against him and then turned to lead the way. Crockett surmised the sagacious animal had found something he could not deal with alone, but it was not a bear. The dog advanced only a short distance before returning to make sure his master was following him.

These maneuvers were repeated many times, the dog displaying a strange disinclination to advance any distance alone. The course he took was new to the hunter, and finally led to a narrow ravine south of and at a considerable distance from the cabin. Here the tangled growth was rendered most difficult to penetration by thick masses of vines.

Crockett halted and lighted his torch of brush, fearing lest he fall into some chasm left by the earthquake. He found he was advancing between a sluggishly flowing stream and a crevice, the two being parallel to each other. Now the dog's barking reached a climax, and his master could hear him leaping back and forth in a most frantic manner.

Gathering more brush Crockett made a new torch, and holding his rifle cocked crept cautiously forward.

"You fool pup! What is it?" he grumbled, in no way pleased to be called from the pleasant cabin, and yet finding his curiosity excited by the animal's peculiar actions.

He held the torch above his head and scanned the overhanging branches suspiciously.

"Bah!" he grunted. "I might 'a' know'd it couldn't be a painter. Tige don't have no truck with painters."

The dog plunged through a screen of bushes and halted. Now he lifted his head and repeated his mournful howling. Crockett followed him and came to a small, cleared space on the banks of the creek. Tige, beset with excitement, was jumping back and forth, each forward lunge all but precipitating him into the dark stream, and each retreat betraying fear. Commanding him to be quiet Crockett observed his flanks

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were bleeding from several long scratches, and quickly deduced he had been fighting with a wild-cat. But there was no cat in the creek, of course.

"Cat was busy with something and the old feller nabbed him, only to be mighty sorry," analyzed Crockett. "Hi, boy! Stand out the way and give the colonel a look."

He forced the dog aside and held the torch over the dark water and cried out in astonishment at beholding the arm of a corpse resting on the bank. A glance told him the whole story. Some wild thing had been salvaging the gruesome find when interrupted by the dog. Only the arm showed above the surface, and Crockett's photographic gaze took note of livid cicatrices on the wrist. By holding the torch low he could make out the outline of the submerged body.

"A dead man!" he whispered. "Not long dead, neither! Not a fancy job, but it must be done."

He dropped his rifle and caught hold of the arm and drew the figure half out of the water and made a new discovery, one that caused him to whistle softly and glance sharply 'round the encircling wall of blackness. It was the body of a powerfully built negro, and it had been disembowled.

"No cat ever ripped him open," Crockett mumbled, letting the body slip back to its former position. "Killed and planted in the crick for keeps. Cut him open so's he would stay under water."

He walked down the bank and observed how the rocks rose close to the surface, making it impossible for the body to be carried beyond them except at freshet water. Turning back he proceeded up-stream until he came to a jam of driftwood hung up on more rocks.

"He was plumped in somewhere above here, probably under this drift. Enough rain to swell the crick and fetch the drift loose. It come this far and got hung up, fetching the body with it. Well, least said soonest mended, as old Johnson 'lowed when he busted a jug over his neighbor's head. You, Davie, lay low a bit. You, Tige, come along with me. Big feller; Macon's Bull, maybe."

The discovery took away Crockett's rollicking mood. He was a lover of genial company, of sunshine, and withal a superb optimist, but there was something in the nature of the slave's taking-off that brought the menace of death to the lonely region. For years Murel was the head of the greatest organization of evil-doers that ever infested the continent. The entire Mississippi Valley was his stage, and on it he had played many parts, with every climax stained with blood.

Hushed voices whispered of the leader's plan to raise the slaves in New Orleans against their masters, preliminary to his taking over Louisiana as his own principality. That gigantic crime had died in its inception, but of less stupendous evils the unwritten history of the organization would fill volumes. The theft of Macon's Bull was characteristic of the gang's technique.

Usually a slave was induced to run away and permit some subordinates—"strikers" they were called to distinguish them from the leaders who were known as "heads"—to sell him. Once the purchase price was paid the slave was directed to run away again, and was promised he should receive a share of the money and safe conduct to a free State. A slave working for his freedom in this fashion would be sold over and over, or until the gang feared he would confess the plot, when he was murdered and all proof destroyed.

Potter Dick, high in power in the mammoth organization, had disappeared at the first symptoms of a drive against the terrible syndicate. River rumor had it he was back, working on a smaller, yet very effective, scale.

"But he can't be working out here," mused Crockett as he made for the cabin. "Nothing out here but bears and Davie Crockett. It does have the Murel-Dick look, however. If the gang did get Bull to go with them by telling him some smooth lie then they'd have to kill him when he showed fight. But even if that's the case they're across and hiding on the Arkansas side before now. Anyway, I won't spoil the young man's evening by blabbing anything tonight."

AS HE came in sight of the cabin's lights he discarded his somber thoughts, determined to reenter into the spirit of the festivities awaiting him. As he swung up to the cabin door he heard strange voices, one mellow and seductive, another harsh and vibrant; and he knew more

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company had arrived during his absence. Commanding the dog to remain outside he threw open the door and entered.

"Welcome back, Colonel," boisterously greeted Skow.

"Left a ten-gallon jug to chase a dawg!" derided Melver.

Two men, who were attacking the platter of venison, rose and approached. One carried himself with military smartness, the classical regularity of his features and his mass of iron-gray hair stamping him with dignity. The pleased smile lighting his handsome face at once predisposed Crockett to him.

Slightly behind him, as though reluctant to leave the table, was an entirely different figure, that of a loose-limbed man, who walked with a stoop that in no way suggested age but oddly enough caused Crockett to believe he was the most powerfully muscled man in the room.

"Colonel Crockett, shake hands with Judge Curtes of Jackson," spoke up Macon.

Crockett's face lighted with pleasure. Judge Curtes' reputation for gallantry and courage was well established throughout Tennessee.

"Salt me up for bear meat if I ain't mighty glad to meet you, Judge," said the hunter.

"And I find it an honor to shake the hand of Colonel Crockett, whose breed makes old Tennessee known throughout the South," warmly responded the judge. "Meet my old friend, Noah Brink, formerly of Maine, now an adopted son of Tennessee."

Brink thrust his craggy face forward as though near-sighted and scrutinized the hunter sharply; then shot forward a bony hand and gave a powerful grip.

"I've heard of you, Colonel," he greeted. "I guess you're the fellow that's shot so many bears."

"I 'low I must be," confessed Crockett, quietly amused at the severity of the New Englander's facial expression.

"I guess it's generally supposed to be necessary to clean them out in a new country," begrudgingly conceded Brink, edging back toward the table; "but economy should be practised even in killing bears. A valuable food supply should not be wasted."

"Oh, we don't waste it," solemnly assured Crockett. "We eat everything but the hide and we use that for bed-clothes. The toe-nails we fix on a stick and use in scratching up the land for planting. A right smart toe-nail hoe is worth four dollars any time in this part of the country. Old man Johnson tried to breed a bear that would grow new nails, thinking to get a bulge on the hoe trade. After a bear enters our cabin there ain't enough of him left to even plaster a Northern tariff tax on to."

"The tariff, Colonel Crockett, is one of God's noblest institutions for protecting a new country," Brink coldly informed, resuming his place at the table.

"Lucky for me it ain't hit the bears yet," grinned Crockett.

Judge Curtes laughed outright, then soberly informed:

"Mr. Brink represents a syndicate of land investors. He comes out here to look over the Obion country. My errand is different, but also seeks the betterment of western Tennessee. We travel together for mutual safety as well as for the enjoyment of each other's company. I move we licker."

"If no one objects it stands approved. It is approved," solemnly ruled Crockett, banging his fist on the table.

"We'll drink to the success of Mr. Brink's and the judge's business out here," said Skow.

"Drink 'em separate to give 'em more power," urged Hicks.

"The chair so rules," cried Crockett.

Brink paused in his hungry assault on the meat and harshly advised:

"I guess you'd better concentrate on the judge. I never touch licker. And I never go into a business deal that depends on luck. I either see a profit or I keep out."

"I 'low that once you get them paws of yours on a profit that profit squeals like a sucking-pig in the arms of a bear," admiringly observed Crockett.

"I 'low it does," was the sarcastic retort.

Judge Curtes' urbanity deepened to an expression of concern, and he soberly said:

"Gentlemen, I appreciate your sincerity in wishing me well. Doubtless I shall need your help as well as your good wishes."

"Fun or a fight, count us in," eagerly promised Skow.

"Old Betsy is always loaded," added Crockett.

"Don't mistake me. I'd never dream of

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asking your aid in a personal matter," hastily protested the judge. "It's something that concerns all of us; for it has to do with the welfare of our glorious State. I have reasons to believe that Potter Dick, one of Murel's old hands, is now operating in southern and western Tennessee. I come here in behalf of the Jackson Defense Committee, which I had the honor to organize recently, to enroll all settlers in this region. We folks in Jackson believe the gang passes through this section of the State in reaching the Arkansas side. Potter Dick must be wiped out."

"Bet he stole my slave!" Macon excitedly cried.

"So do I," Crockett grimly agreed. "If I get a chance I'll tickle him with this, a long time before I make him laugh."

He whipped out his butcher-knife with a flourish.

Brink wiped his wide mouth on his sleeve and came forward to announce:

"You gentlemen understand, please, that I differ from Judge Curtes somewhat in regard to his Defense Society. There are duly elected forces in this State, whose only excuse for holding office is to suppress lawlessness. I come here to look into possible investments. I leave it to the authorities to do their duty and uphold the law."

"Hurrah for the hot-headed volunteer!" cheered Crockett.

"I take your meaning, sir. It is nothing to me. Before I left New England I guess we all knew how easy it was to excite mob-spirit in the South. If I discover this desperado's whereabouts I shall call on the duly elected officers to take him and shall expect the courts to terminate his career. I speak this plainly so no one will misunderstand my position. I esteem Judge Curtes highly, but I owe a duty to my business associates, the duty of returning to Jackson alive and filing my report on the prospects out here."

"Mr. Brink is well within his rights," said the judge quickly, and frowning at young Macon, who threatened to explode in an angry tirade. "But we've neglected the kind toasts."

After the ceremony was completed Skow returned to the topic by regretting:

"I'd hoped that kind of work was all ended. If I hadn't believed so I'd never have built this post."

"It soon will be," gritted Macon, lowering at the imperturbable Brink.

"We'll have to look into it a trifle," agreed Crockett. "How can any one tell your man, Macon?"

"A good six feet, strong as a bull. Mention me and he'll come flying. Bull wouldn't leave the plantation for all the cheap jewelry in Natchez. His right wrist is badly scarred where he was slashed with a knife by a drunken foreman."

"Jim shot the foreman," parenthetically informed the judge.

"More mob-law!" snorted Brink.

"He consulted me—afterwards. I found it a case of aggravated assault," mildly explained the judge. "But the conversation is in a gloomy channel. Let's have some of the colonel's stories."

Nothing loath Crockett recounted some of his experiences in the Legislature, given with a whimsical seriousness, and all so richly couched in the broad humor of the day and place that even Brink was forced to smile. The others were continuously convulsed with laughter. As he kept up the entertainment Crockett was quick to detect a bond of attachment between the judge and Macon. Once, as he paused for the mugs to be refilled, Skow whispered in his ear—

"Jim's sweet on the judge's girl, Tillie."

Crockett rose and, with the courtly grace it was so natural for him to assume when the occasion prompted, offered:

"Gentlemen, here's to the best little woman in the world, whether she lives in a lonely cabin in the cane, or in—Jackson."

And the eagerness with which Macon drank the toast left no doubt in the colonel's mind as to the truth of Skow's statement. Then again Judge Curtes' little smile and his friendly way of resting a hand on the young man's shoulder were very illuminating.

CHAPTER II

THE BOATMEN

BRINK retired to a pallet of robes at the end of the room off the kitchen and slept undisturbed by the night's jollity. The others were too hard-headed to make up lost sleep, and when Brink arose in the morning to partake of the excellent breakfast prepared by Skow he found his companions ready for a day's fun or work.

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It was Crockett's custom to pay his way by contributing to the larder, and after satisfying the backwoods appetite he took Old Betsy and set forth with the dog to find an elk or a deer. Brink called after him and asked if he might accompany him for a bit, explaining—

"I guess it's a good time for me to begin seeing what this country is like 'round here."

"It's like hell turned upside down, but come along," invited Crockett.

Melver, Hicks and Macon became involved in an argument and Skow took advantage of their clamoring to draw Judge Curtes outside the door, whispering—

"A word for your ear, Jedge."

"Speak to the point," snapped the judge, inclined to return and quiet the hot-headed planter. "Jim Macon hasn't a legal mind, and he's apt to grow pestiferous. There's only one who can keep him tame."

And he smiled fondly as he pictured his motherless girl.

"It's what you said last night about Potter Dick being busy 'round here," continued Skow. "It made me uneasy."

"And what did I say that should cause you, or any other honest man any concern, sir?" coldly demanded the judge, his gaze growing frosty.

"Well, it's bad talk, as the Injuns put it. We all think a heap of you, Jedge. From here to the Mississippi and up the Obion to McLemone's Bluff you can't find a man that ain't for you. We all know you're booked for Congress—if nothing happens to spoil things."

"Spoil things? You talk in riddles, man!" exploded the judge, yet willing to listen. "Speak out! Do you mean violence will be used against me? If so, you insult me. Is some one to run against me? My friends have assured me there will be no opposition worth the name. Even if I do say it, Congress is the natural climax of my—ah—career."

"Never a truer word spoke, Jedge!" warmly agreed Skow. "You've got the towns and the backwoods. You've got the canebrake vote. There ain't no one who'd care to buck against you, except it be Davie Crockett."

Haughtiness gave place to concern.

"Crockett, eh?" mused the judge. "Yes; he would be a powerful opponent. But when I sounded him about his ambitions last night, and mentioned Washington, he said in his quaint way, 'For me to get to Congress is a huckleberry over my persimmon.' I believe he is shrewd enough to realize the national House is a bit above his reach."

Skow smiled.

"When you see anything above Davie Crockett's reach, Jedge, you just keep your eyes peeled and watch him shin up to it. Remember this, Jedge; Crockett can't keep out of a political race or a shooting-match any more than his dogs can help chasing bears. If any of his friends hunt him up in the cane and get him interested he'll make it a hard race for you."

"I don't underrate his popularity. He is a very remarkable man. I can see how he would be very strong on the stump."

"There's one way to keep him out of the running; sign him up to work for you. Just now he's having fun. He's ripe to promise anything. Once he promises he'll 'go ahead,' as he puts it. But get his promises before he goes to Shoal Crick after his family. When he gets down there some of his neighbors may put a bee in his bonnet."

Judge Curtes' eyes twinkled with a sudden resolve.

"Skow, I'm indebted to you for the interest you display in my candidacy, and in the advice you've given me. I'm frank to say I shall try to follow it. I believe Colonel Crockett will be pleased to lend me a hand. Later on he will refine his coarseness of speech, and wisdom will take the place of drollery. Then he'll be ripe to seek the honor for himself. He'll gain much valuable schooling in working for me. But what's all this to do with Potter Dick?"

Skow floundered about for several moments, then blurted out.

"It's pesky hard for me to say it. If I wasn't your friend, Jedge, I couldn't do it. But once you had dealings with certain men in a land deal, back before the New Purchase was put through."

The judge flushed hotly and bitterly retorted:

"Years ago my enemies accused me of profiting by what to me was a perfectly honorable transaction. I emerged from that situation, sir, with an unblemished reputation. I'll resent any imputation to the contrary, sir, according to old Tennessee's unwritten code; just as I did at

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the time, sir, to the painful experience of two loosely spoken scum."

And one long thin hand slipped to the pocket where he carried a derringer.

"Good Lawd! You can't fasten no fight on me, Jedge! Save your fire for your enemies. I know the old land-swindle took you in as much as it did any one and that you did your best to help folks get something back——"

"They got every penny back, sir. I sold my plantation to square off every investor who was victimized," the judge cut in. "That is all ended."

Skow essayed once more to explain himself without giving mortal offense, selecting his words carefully.

"All dead and ended. But there were some in the deal who were Heads of Council under Murel. They stood mighty high in the community."

"If they hadn't left the country overnight I would have had them into court and hung every man-jack of them higher than Haman, sir. Failing in that, could I and my friends be expected to run them down?" bristled the judge.

"Of course not. Yet old lies are brought to life during political campaigns. The baldest, rottenest lies. They're dragged out and tossed about just before election. Men hear them and git hot-headed. There ain't no time to look into them, no time even to remember things right. After two or three weeks folks wake up and wonder they were ever such dumbheads to believe such lies. But they wake up after they vote. And the man who started the lies may be in Congress."

The judge was now at the boiling-point, unable to speak. From inside the door Melver's excited voice rang out:

"An' I tell ye that the Murel crowd run things 'cause no one knowed who belonged to the gang. Give a man something he can see an' he'll fight like ——. But how can he fight a name? Huh? How can he stand off a gang that may have one of its men in the cabin next to his'n; or in the next plantation?

"That's what raises hob with a feller's guts. It's the feelin' he's surrounded by them an' that they're goin' to git him. He gits a notion that so-an'-so is one of the gang, an' he'll be barkin' up the wrong tree, while the man he rides and eats with an' calls his best friend may be the very feller that's got a knife up his sleeve. Murel's gone, but lots of his old men are stickin' 'round these parts. So, Mister Macon, ye can argur' till —— has a frost-bite."

"That's about what I was trying to say," whispered Skow.

In a colorless voice the judge apologized:

"Skow, I was hasty. Your pardon. It's true that that land matter, although perfectly understood at the time, might come up to bother me just long enough to swamp me at the polls. But how do you know that the men my Defense Society is after were connected with that old swindle? So far as I know none of the men who fled the country ever returned."

"I reckon they all stayed away," agreed Skow. "But even if there ain't one in Potter Dick's gang who was mixed up in that they'll set a back-fire once they know you're trying to run them down. And the land deal is the only thing they can use against you. Queer yarns will be peddled 'round the country. Some will say you went into the deal because you was one of Murel's silent partners——"

"Damnation! I sold my plantation to pay off every penny!"

"How many folks know you did that?"

The judge stared at him in amazement.

"Good God, sir! Do you think me so cheap as to make a virtue out of the only honorable amend within my power? Do you think I advertised the restitution I made to those victims, who were decoyed into what they believed to be a legitimate enterprise——"

"Exactly, Judge. So only a few, if any alive today, know that crooked game cost you a mighty fine plantation. Some of the men you squared have died; others left the country. Some would be onery enough to demand more money to help save your political hide. But before you could make a move to show up the lies the votes would be counted."

Mopping the sweat from his brow the judge demanded—

"Then what can I do?"

"Drop this Defense Society work."

"Never! I'm astounded at your suggestion. What is my personal ambitions compared with the welfare of Tennessee?"

"Bully for you, Jedge!" And Skow seized and wrung his hand warmly. "I put it too blunt. But at least don't advertise what you're going to do. Keep

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it under cover. Maybe the gang is already over in Arkansas. If so they won't give a rap what you say. Keep on working, but don't shoot off steam when it can't do no good. Talk up to the colonel and get his pledge to help you."

"Skow, I sha'n't forget your kindness. I'll speak to Crockett during the day. I've already announced the purpose of my visit here and there won't be any need of my harping on it. But if they get to whispering that I was associated with that nefarious gang. Good heavens! They might even go so far as to hint I was associated with this Potter Dick! Well, well. Brink and I will be going back just as soon as he has looked the country over. Perhaps it will die down before election."

"Say as little as you can. Give it a chance to die down."

With this final bit of advice Skow entered the cabin just as Macon flung himself away from Hicks and Melver.

THE young planter was hot with irritation.

"Let's take a short walk, Judge. It's new to me as well as to you," he urged.

Judge Curtes fell in beside him and for several minutes they strode along with no attempt at conversation. Macon spoke first, complaining:

"I know I'm quick-tempered, but those two idiots got me hot under the collar. Trying to cram down my throat the notion that it's best for a fellow to allow the tag-ends of the old Murel gang to do as they please instead of fighting back! Because I stuck to it that I reckoned Bull was stolen by some of Potter Dick's crowd you'd reckon by the way they yapped that it was better for me to lose my best slave than to get the gang down on me for keeps. Judge, you put me down on your Defense Society as an active member, and underscore my name. If any money's needed—well, cotton's high, you know."

The judge coughed gently and slowly replied:

"Perhaps it's best not to magnify the so-called Potter Dick activities. At the worst it's only the desperate work of a few of the old gang. Probably their dying kick over the legal traces. I'm quite convinced they've quit the country on the run, never to return. I'm inclined to believe there isn't much for the society to do."

"So long as there's a chance of a single scoundrel remaining in Tennessee unhung there's work for honest men to do," was the hot retort.

The judge drew himself stiffly erect and ominously replied—

"I trust, Mr. Macon, you're not presuming to teach me my duty towards law-breakers?"

"Good heavens, Judge! A million times, no! Why, Judge, when you take that tone and begin 'mistering' me—— See here, Judge; if you do it again I'll tell Tillie. At least she can face you down."

Instantly the older man's face grew tender. Patting Macon's shoulder he gently eulogized:

"Tillie! Was there ever such a girl as Tillie? What have you ever done to deserve her?"

"It makes me feel sad at times," groaned Macon. "Like it couldn't be real. Too good to be true."

The judge laughed softly.

"Cheer up, Jim. Remember there isn't a man on earth who deserves that girl. I won't 'mister' you again, my boy. I'm in a peck of trouble. By organizing the Defense Society I may have lost my chance of going to Congress. I'm human, beastly so. That means I'm selfish. If the gang is so powerful it needs must be hunted by a special organization, it's strong enough to do me harm in my campaign. It's possible that the old land-swindle I've told you all about may be raked up against me.

"Why, for all I know some of the members of the society may be Potter Dick's henchmen. And it rasps across the grain to think of the price I may have to pay for the sake of running down some border ruffians who are destined to violent deaths in any event, even if left alone."

Macon gaped in astonishment, then shivered in alarm. It was essential for his great happiness that the judge should go to Congress. He and Matilda had talked it all over many times. She would feel free to marry him when her father went to Washington. To become the mistress of the Macon plantation while her father lived alone in Jackson was a reproach to her sense of duty.

Inwardly cursing his hasty speech of a few minutes back Macon awkwardly began:

"Why, Judge, if that's the way the dog jumps the whole —— Potter Dick outfit

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ain't worth one of your thoughts. You must go to Congress. Your country needs you. There's enough of us stay-at-homes to settle the hash of any Murel left-overs. Look here; why couldn't you resign as head of the society and put me in your place? You could explain——"

"Thank you, Jim. That would never do, however." Yet the judge's gravity concealed a new lightness of spirit. "I shall endeavor to do my duty regardless of any personal inconvenience. We'll speak of it later. Here comes Colonel Crockett. You can leave me when he joins us as I wish to talk with him alone."

"The colonel and others," corrected Macon, as four men trailed from the woods behind the hunter. "He's bagged a deer and they're helping him fetch it in."

Crockett saw them and waved his fur hat and whooped like an Indian. In a few minutes he was exuberantly introducing the strangers as boatmen on their way to deliver supplies to the McLemone's Bluff trading-post, and temporarily delayed by low water.

"Snagged tight where the old hurricane blowed so much timber into the river," he added. "Thought they'd come across and see Skow's post while they was waiting for a rain to lift the river. They'd missed their way and was making straight south for Mississippi when they ran across me butchering this deer. Rance, here, has fetched a large middling of bacon, and what with the game we can have a rip-roarous feed."

"An' a rifle-match," eagerly appended Rance, staring in childish delight at the tall form of the hunter. "Why, Colonel, down in Memphis t'other night we broke up a mighty good keerd game jest to talk about yer shootin'."

"Gambling's a burlesque on human nature," grumbled Crockett, who could never tolerate games of chance.

"Mebbe; but Tebbets here 'lowed there wa'n't yer equal in the world, an' Joe Hogan, this sawed-off, was fool enough to 'low he could shoot some."

"Wal, Joe can shoot some," spoke up the fourth man. "Meanin' no offense to Colonel Crockett."

"Croper, ye 'n' Joe Hogan make me sick," groaned Rance. "Shoot some? Ye blamed ijiotic cat-fish, ye've got to shoot like —— to be in the same State with the colonel."

The judge and Macon laughed broadly at this outburst, while Crockett smiled in his whimsical fashion and modestly remarked—

"There may be better shots then me, but they ain't poling flour and whisky up the Obion."

"I handled a rifle long before I ever poled a boat," gruffly informed Hogan.

"An' he ain't never forgot how 'cause he keeps in practise," chimed in Croper.

Removing his hat and bowing with a little flourish Judge Curtes announced:

"Gentlemen, rifle shooting has won us half a continent. I believe it will win us the other half. I shall feel highly privileged if you'll permit me to hang up a prize, say, of ten dollars for the winner."

"You'll never hurt my feelings talking like that," said Crockett with a grin.

The others began cheering the judge, and Skow and his companions came running from the cabin. The new-comers were introduced to the trader and his men, after which ceremony the details of the rifle-match were zestfully gone into. To the west Tennesseean the rifle was as an absorbing a topic of conversation as was a race-horse to a Kentucky man. To Crockett's surprize Hicks and Melver professed to have heard of Hogan's marksmanship and seemed to be in doubt as to the winner.

"I've just crawled out of the cane to see what's going on among white folks" meekly explained Crockett. "I really don't know much about shooting. My coon dogs hunt every night to keep me in pelts. All I have to say to them is, 'One gallon, boys,' and away they go and away they stay till they can fetch me back eight coons. If the fur ain't any good I force myself to go out and shoot a wolf and sell the scalp for three dollars State bounty. And that's how I get along on the big string. As for my shooting, it's mostly yarns the fellows made up about me when I went to the Legislature."

"Then ye admit ye ain't no great shakes with a rifle?" roughly queried Hogan, who seemed anxious to show prejudice against the hunter.

"Lord bless you as you may deserve, no," heartily replied Crockett. "I just try to stand up to my lick-log, salt or no salt."

"I 'low there won't be much salt on your log this trip," growled Hogan.

"Hurrah for the Continental Congress!

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Nothing like knowing your bad luck ahead so's you can enjoy it," cried Crockett, clapping Hogan on the shoulder.

"Look here, stranger, don't do that ag'in, even if ye be Davie Crockett," warned Hogan.

Crockett stared at him thoughtfully. Surprize and dismay showed in the faces of the others, who had looked ahead for a good-natured contest, plus a royal feast and limitless liquor. Then Crockett began to smile, his eyes twinkling mischievously.

"I didn't go for to hurt you, neighbor," he apologized. "I keep forgetting my hand can be extry heavy."

"Mebbe ye can rassle a bit—the same as ye can shoot?"

"Just about the same," drawled Crockett. "We'll shoot, then we'll wrestle. But all the wrestling I ever done was with bears, and they're awkward. Beyond working up a man's strength a trifle they don't give him much practise. Suppose we shoot off a string before dinner?"

AS THIS suited every one's fancy a range was soon marked off. At Crockett's suggestion it was decided that all should participate, excepting Judge Curtes, who asked to be excused but offered to serve as referee.

Tebbets, Croper and Rance shot in turn and shot well. Skow, Melver, Hicks and Macon followed, with Skow standing high man of the seven, with Macon a close second.

"My ears for a heel-tap if that ain't good shooting," loudly indorsed Crockett.

"That's boy's shootin'," sneered Hogan, stepping forward.

He aimed with much deliberation and when he fired a cry of applause burst from the group. The bullet had lodged within a fraction of an inch of dead center.

"Shoot up to that," he invited, his manner unaccountably malevolent.

"I'll try," lightly replied Crockett, flashing his teeth in a wide grin.

Toeing the mark he raised his rifle carelessly, or seemingly so, and pulled the trigger before, as the spectators believed, he could have sighted the target. A sharp yelp from Macon, a loud shout from the others; and Judge Curtes was announcing:

"Dead center. Every one come forward and examine it."

The men rushed to the target. It was a perfect shot. Hogan wrathfully cried out:

"A shot like that is pure luck. 'Nother shot for every one."

"There was no understanding that you should shoot again," coldly reminded the judge.

"Oh, another shot by all means," insisted Crockett. "Probably was a mistake."

This time the others refused to shoot, and Crockett took his place to fire first. The crack of his rifle was followed by silence, then Croper shouted—

"He didn't even hit the target!"

"There ain't any mistakes in Old Betsy," serenely informed Crockett, stepping aside.

Judge Curtes went close to the target; then in pained surprize called out:

"Looks like a complete miss, Colonel. Your lead failed to score anywhere."

"I 'low that makes it a tie," laughed Hogan. "If I hit anywhere I beat him this string."

Young Macon whispered to the hunter—

"Are you sure you put in the bullet?"

Crockett began laughing uproariously, but broke off to leap forward and knock Hogan's gun aside. With an infuriated yell Hogan swung the rifle back as a club, but Crockett poised the butcher-knife by the tip of the blade, ready to hurl it, and quietly informed:

"I wanted to give you every chance, Mister Hogan. Before doing any careless shooting you'd better have the judge dig out the two bullets I put through the center. There's no mistakes in Old Betsy."

This amazing assertion quite took Hogan's breath away, and he lowered his rifle and glared incredulously at the hunter. Some of the men smiled; all looked skeptical. Judge Curtes produced a knife and carefully extricated a bullet from the tree trunk behind the target. Then he called out—

"Step up here, gentlemen, before I go after the other one."

After they had gathered about him he gingerly inserted the point of his blade and as he probed his face betrayed great surprize.

"Well, I'll be ——!" he murmured. "Here, Skow, you finish the job. I can feel it."

Completely astounded, Hogan watched Skow take the knife and excavate a bullet.

"Thought you was going to throw a shot away, Hogan," said Crockett.

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The wizardry of such shooting threw Hogan off his nerve, and his second shot was three inches wide of his first.

"That gives you the prize, Colonel. And I must congratulate you," said Judge Curtes, fumbling in his pocket.

"You speak very handsome, Judge. And I'd rather have it in trade. Now do we licker? Or do we have that wrestling-match next?"

The last was addressed to Hogan.

Hogan hunched his square shoulders back and forth and decided—

"Let's licker an' eat."

With that he sullenly strode ahead toward the cabin, his friends at his heels.

The judge fell back and placed a hand on Crockett's shoulder, and confided—

"Colonel, if I could shoot like that I should feel very proud."

Crockett laughed carelessly.

"Still all my fancy shooting won't do more than to kill about so many bear. Now if every congressman had to know how to shoot I'd be some persimmon 'round election time."

This was a propitious opening and the judge was quick to seize it.

"You're a young man, Colonel. Your time is coming. I'm sixty-three, and I've been asked by my friends to run for Congress. I believe I have Madison County solid. But I want your help out here. Will you support me?"

Crockett's mien became grave and serious.

"And I want to go," naively added the judge; and the frank confession appealed strongly to Crockett's sympathies.

"See here, Judge; just now I ain't planning to run for Congress. Still, I'm a changeable cuss."

"Colonel Crockett, if you'll support me I'll agree not to stand for reelection, and you shall have an open field so far as I'm concerned and my backing into the bargain. It may be selfish. Certainly it is vanity, but I'd like to round out my career by going to Washington. I believe I can do some good work there."

"You can do a heap of good if you'll make sure you're right, and then be sure to go ahead. I'll admit, Judge, the way you lammed into that Potter Dick outfit last night did my heart good. I warmed up to you. I says to myself, 'Here's a man who's left a comfortable home, the society of his friends, and come way out here to the backwoods because he 'lowed it was his duty to come. Here's a man to tie to.' Judge, I'll help you on one condition. It's this—that between now and election no reason crops up why I shouldn't help you. I'll give my word on that condition, and I wish I may be shot if I don't do my best."

"But why should you suspect something might turn up to prevent your helping me?" asked the judge, blanching a bit as he recalled his conversation with Skow.

"Bless you, Judge, I haven't any idee anything will turn up. But I wouldn't promise Andy Jackson, himself, to support him blindly. I never put on any man's collar. You have my word on that one condition, which I know in your case is only a manner of speaking."

"I shall never forget it. If you don't mind I'd rather not mention politics while Brink's around. We're friends, you understand, but he's queer. He's from the North. A good man and a good friend, but with a queer sense of duty at times. You never can tell."

They had halted outside the cabin and Crockett frowned slightly at the request. Then his face cleared up, and he agreed:

"All right. But it's my notion to dig in as soon as possible. When I promised I was planning to begin on the boatmen. I was even 'lowing to almost break Hogan's neck wrestling to get his vote for you. But it's your coon. I'll hold my fire till you give the word. Only don't wait till the coon gets away.

"And you understand, Judge, it ain't because you're on the bench that made me warm to you. It's the fact you're public-spirited enough to come out here and try to break up that gang of nigger-stealing murderers. That's what fetched me. I'll soon have my family on the Obion. The man who helps to make the Obion safe for women and children drills dead-center with me every time. So you count on me to help run down those varments as well as in getting votes! Win out against Potter Dick and his gang and your election is a walk-over."

The judge winced and sparred.

"Perhaps you've taken my business here too seriously. I must be perfectly frank with you, Colonel. Now I'm almost inclined to believe I've exaggerated the Dick gang to myself. I may have magnified an ordinary

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act of lawlessness. After all, there is no legal evidence that any of Murel's old gang are active in these parts. We remember them and their evil work, and are inclined to attribute every detached crime as belonging to a carefully planned criminal program. Even my society is really more of a preventive——"

"No! no!" harshly obtruded Crockett. "You followed the right trail in coming here. I've found Macon's Bull, murdered and sunk in a crick within a mile of this cabin. That means Potter Dick passed here recently. Here comes Brink. Shall we tell him and the others?"

CHAPTER III

THE MESSENGER FROM JACKSON

JUDGE CURTES urged Crockett to say nothing of his gruesome find for the present.

"Publicity won't do any good just now and it would send Jim up in the air. It would be impossible to control him at first, and if any spy of the gang is in this neighborhood he would soon know we had learned something. That would send the gang to cover."

Crockett agreed to this, and reminded:

"I ain't much of a hand to go blabbing things just for the sake of being first with the news. I took my time in telling you what I found in the crick."

Brink now joined them and the judge saluted.

"Welcome back. What have you learned about the country?"

"Poor prospect so far as I've been. Dropped into a hole and nearly broke my neck," was the gruff response.

"Don't abuse the holes left by the earthquake," pleaded Crockett. "The development of the country depends on them. Take one of those long cracks and plug up the ends and then fill it full of salt pickle and I 'low it'll hold enough bear's meat to last a family a century. There's one back of my cabin on the Obion that I figger will hold about a thousand bears. Your company oughter capitalize those cracks. Post a notice that every buyer of land will find one on his section and then see the settlers rush in.

"Why, you've got one of the grandest properties in the world, if you use them cracks right. No more wasted meat. Shoot a bear, eat the liver and paws and sling the rest into pickle. Our great-great-grandchildren will be going out to one of those cracks and fishing out a hunk of meat, long, long after every bear in the State has been killed."

"We'll have to wait for another earthquake before we'll have crevices enough to hold all the liars out this way," snarled Brink, with a sweeping glance that included the grinning faces in the door, as well as the colonel.

Crockett chuckled in keen delight; but Hogan took it ill. Lowering on Brink he ominously warned—

"Stranger, ye jest count me out of them liars ye speak of."

Brink eyed him contemptuously and said:

"All right. You don't look as if you had enough brains to tell a passable lie. You're out."

A roar of rough mirth applauded the retort. Hogan scratched his head, undecided as to what action he should take. Observing the broad grin on the hunter's face he truculently demanded—

"Laffin' at his idee of a joke, eh?"

"No," soberly returned Crockett, drawing a long face. "I was laughing at you."

Another shout from the men and Hogan's small eyes glittered evilly.

"Folks don't laff at me as a rule," he muttered, rolling up his sleeves and approaching Crockett.

"Fight! Fight!" shouted Melver and Rance. "Form a ring!"

"Hold on, boys!" begged Skow. "Let's have no fighting. Wait till after we've et. If you don't feel better towards each other then you can settle matters."

"Let's eat by all means. I'm sharp set," Crockett amiably agreed. "Then we have a wrestling-match to go through with. After we get the wrestling out of the way we can have some fun fighting."

"I'll wait," grimly assented Hogan.

In view of the forthcoming entertainment the men were not inclined to linger at the table. Crockett was the last to rise, whereas Hogan finished first and stood in the doorway, his arms folded across his powerful chest. The hunter cast him a merry glance and winked exasperatingly.

"I just had to have this extry slice of prime venison with a few scraps of bacon before settling your goose," he informed.

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"I'm still waiting," Hogan tersely replied.

Crockett rose and stretched his long arms luxuriously and slowly followed Hogan outside. Judge Curtes disapproved of the affair because of the bad blood behind it, and even suggested they "licker up" and become friends.

"If he crawls we'll call it off. No one can make him rassle," growled Hogan.

"I'll take you on for a trifle," cheerfully returned Crockett as he removed his hunting-shirt. "If I find you're hurting me I'll quit."

Brink stood in the doorway, picking his teeth with his knife. To Macon he said—

"If I were a gambling man I should pick Mr. Hogan as the winner."

Hot-eyed with excitement young Macon shot back—

"Five thousand that the colonel makes him eat dirt."

"I never gamble," Brink coldly reminded.

"This ain't a gamble," gravely explained Crockett. "It's a sure thing. I never see a man with a face like Hogan's but what I know he's my meat. Right here in front of the door, with the jug handy in case of sudden sickness, will do nicely."

Hogan strode to the level space and waited for Crockett to join him. The hunter carelessly asked:

"What's your strong hold, neighbor? Name your best brand of wrestling as I want you to have every advantage possible."

"Keel-boat style," was the grim answer.

"Oh, no, gentlemen!" protested Judge Curtes. "That is too brutal, needlessly so. Remember, we're not in a drunken brawl at Natchez-under-the-hill."

"Keel-boat style means anything goes. River-men's way. No rules," Macon explained to Brink.

Brink nodded approval, and demanded:

"And why not? If either gets an advantage he'd be a fool not to profit by it because of some foolish rule. It allows each man to wrestle his own way, I take it."

"It's my way," gritted Hogan.

"It's the way me and the bears always wrestle," chuckled Crockett. "Are you ready, neighbor?"

Hogan left the ground in a beautiful leap, moving with the ease of a catamount despite his stocky build, and, landing just outside Crockett's outstretched arms, sank to his heels, only to spring up erect and inside the hunter's guard. One powerful arm instantly encircled the hunter's waist while the other was pushed against the brown throat; one arm tightening like a vise, the other forcing the head back until it seemed the neck must snap if Crockett did not surrender. The maneuver was scarcely under way, however, when the hunter's left fist shot up under his adversary's right arm, flinging it aside and leaving the neck free.

"I'm the original Davie Crockett," he good-naturedly observed, giving Hogan's bull neck a sudden twist that elicited a low groan.

With an oath Hogan darted a hand at Crockett's face, the short, stubby thumb essaying to gouge out an eye. In a twinkling Crockett seized the wrist and reversed his position so as to bring Hogan across his back. Then with a tremendous buck of his shoulders, accompanied by a mighty tug on the imprisoned arm, he astounded the spectators by hurling the man over his head and into the cabin doorway. The boatman struck with terrific force.

"Gawdamighty! Ye've killed him!" gasped the man Croper.

"I'd have to wear out the floor to do that," answered Crockett. "Give him a drink and send him out."

Hogan crawled to his feet and stared stupidly about.

"Who lugged me in here?" he asked.

This brought a shout, and young Macon shrilly cried:

"You went in all alone, man. We thought you were quitting to get a drink. What would you do now, Brink, if you were a gambling chap?"

With a bellow of rage Hogan reeled toward Macon, but Rance and Tebbets caught him, the latter assuring:

"That's right, Hogan. He threw ye plumb through the door."

"If there's any question about it I'll do it again. Or if he chooses I'll heave him over the roof," quietly offered Crockett.

HOGAN sank down in the doorway and stared thoughtfully at his opponent. Then he groaned:

"Done for afore I could git started! Done for at keel-boat style by a measly bear-hunter!"

"That's about the way it seems to be happening," Crockett gravely agreed. "And I'll take it kindly if you'll quit orating and

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come here so we can finish. I've got to tote a two-gallon jug twenty miles to the Obion and it's high time I was starting."

Hogan rose, but not to wrestle.

"I quit," he sullenly surrendered. "A man's a fool to keep on after bein' downed at his own game."

"Common sense," approved Brink. "There's no satisfaction in being a loser."

"It's very handsome and very sensible in Mister Hogan to speak as he has," drawled Crockett. "But if I remember right there was a little matter of a fight atween us. I'll wait for him to get all rested up."

"Fight?" howled Hogan. "Ye backwoods clown, wa'n't I fightin' my best when ye tossed me through the door? We had the rassle an' fight all in one."

"Then we've got the record straight and can adjourn inside and sign the papers," Crockett briskly retorted.

As they filed into the cabin, heaping raillery on the sullen Hogan, no one found fault with the brevity of the match excepting Brink. He sneered:

"If you folks call that wrestling don't ever carry your game to New England. They'd laugh at you."

"I reckon we'll have to take your word for it, Mr. Brink, never having seen any New England wrestlers," Macon tartly replied.

"Mebbe he'll take one of us on," hungrily suggested Rance.

"Crockett's the only man who could make me work and I guess I'd be a little too much for him," Brink calmly retorted.

As he spoke he picked up an iron poker from the fireplace, and without any apparent effort bent it into a half-circle.

Amazed at this unexpected display of strength the men were still staring at him when Crockett said:

"With bone-breaking hands like them I 'low you're too much for a poor bear-hunter to fuss with. But that's no reason why you should mess up Skow's furniture like that."

And taking the poker he easily straightened it and stood it in its place.

"Good! Good!" shouted Judge Curtes. "Confess, Brink, that's one on you."

The man from New England smiled grimly and conceded:

"Not every man can do it. I guess it's better if the colonel and I don't have any trouble. Both might get hurt."

The mugs were filled and emptied. Then Crockett picked up his rifle and jug, slung the green bear pelt over his back, whistled to his dog and said:

"Now that everybody's happy I'll be shoving along. Best of luck to all. I've had a mighty fine time."

They sought to detain him but he remained firm.

"I've left a younker at the cabin who might get lonesome, or take it into his head to go after a bear."

"You'll see me out to your place in a few days," Macon said. "If they took Bull across to the Arkansas side they must have gone down the Obion."

"And you'll see me, Colonel, if I decide to do any more land-looking," Brink added. "Perhaps that's why I didn't want to break any of your bones."

"Come, every one. If there ain't room in the cabin we'll soon stick up another," heartily urged Crockett. "Don't bother to tote anything in 'less it's some of the creature. I can shoot enough game for an army without getting out of my blankets." With that he shook hands with all, including the silent Hogan, and with elastic step passed into the torn and twisted forest.

ONCE out of sight and hearing of the cabin Crockett halted and concealed his jug and bear pelt in the crotch of a poplar, and, with a word that brought his dog to his heels, turned at right-angles to the line of spotted trees and cautiously worked his way into a *chevaux-de-frise* of ancient timbers. It was slow work, as many of the trees were heaped up in a reversed position, their radiating roots high in the air and their broken tops forming an impenetrable mesh under-foot. But the hunter was used to such rough travel and after an hour emerged into a normal growth.

"Out of my course," he mused, pausing to get his bearings. "Last night I went quick and didn't hog into any stuff like that. Oughter turned off sooner."

Turning he followed a line parallel to his back track and at last was rewarded by striking the mouth of the dark ravine. Now he could fully appreciate the chaotic damage done by the earthquake. The ground was scarred and broken to pieces

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in all directions, and extreme caution was necessary to prevent his stumbling into one of the many crevices. He believed that this, his second, trip up the ravine, was more difficult than the visit he paid the night before. Only he wondered how he had ever managed to escape the pitfalls in the darkness.

The dog sensed his master's errand and whined softly.

"All right, Tige. Now you're sure you're right you can go ahead. But no bears, mind you. This is business, as old Johnson said when he licked his wife."

The dog took the lead, pausing occasionally and whining softly as a signal to his master. At last Crockett lost him for several minutes, and when the animal next called it was in suppressed excitement.

"Derned varment's treed something," grumbled the hunter, pressing on. "But it ain't his bear nor painter voice. More like he was worried and puzzled over something."

At last he broke through the bushes and found himself on the spot of his gruesome discovery of the night before. Tige was running up and down the bank of the stream, whining dolefully. Crockett advanced, then fell back in astonishment. The body of the slave had disappeared. A glance at the sluggish water and the scarcely concealed barrier of rocks down-stream convinced him it could not have been washed away.

Kneeling on the bank he studied the ground critically and found signs which indicated a recent visit to the creek. At first he could not decide whether these were marks left by him in the darkness or by a more recent visitor. Then a broken fern and some trampled grass in an area he knew he had not invaded convinced him that some one had been there after he found the body.

Calling the dog he put him on the trail and sternly commanded him to lead the way. Tige obeyed and soon came to a halt at the edge of a deep cleft. Sitting back on his haunches he lifted his head and would have uttered his "death-howl," had not Crockett caught him by the neck and shook him.

Having quieted the animal he improvised a torch from the dead brush and lighted it and held it over the dark opening. He could not see the bottom. He tested the depth with a pebble, and murmured—

"Deep and black enough a grave to hold him tight till the last trump, or my name ain't Davie Crockett."

Waving the torch swiftly to make it blaze more brightly he dropped it into the chasm. Down it swirled and landed on a heap of rocks, its dying flare lighting them brightly.

Rising, Crockett informed the hound:

"More'n fifty feet. And covered over with rocks. To make sure he's under the rocks we'll find where they was torn from."

A brief investigation revealed where boulders had been rolled from their resting-places; and there was no longer any doubt but that he had found the last resting-place of Macon's Bull. His trip to the ravine resulted from curiosity and an intuitive suggestion that he might find traces in daylight he had overlooked at night; traces that might give some clue to the identity of the murderers.

The removal of the body established one all-important fact; some member, or members, of Potter Dick's gang still remained in the neighborhood. The trail he had followed from the creek to the grave was that of some one walking. He had observed no signs to suggest the body had been dragged. This tended to prove that more than one man had participated in hiding the body. In fact, no one man could carry Macon's Bull, he believed.

Leaning against a tree he set his shrewd mind to work and soon was telling the hound:

"There was six of us there last night after I found the body. There was ten of us after the boatmen came. Now did some one of the ten shift the body from the crick to this crack? If so, and I can find out which one, then I've got hold of the thread that'll unravel the whole business. I'll let the judge have all the credit, and he can go to Congress a-humming.

"He's promised to step aside, and he's the kind that keeps his word. And if Davie Crockett feels a hankering to live in Washington a bit he'll have his chance. I've got to go back to the cabin, Tige, and I've got to rig up a mighty good reason. Huh! But that's a hard excuse to make. No; I don't have to break it; I can say I broke it and leave it where it is.

"What's that, old boy, you're telling me with your eyes? I've larned you to be sure you're right, and then go ahead? Well,

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that's true. You're right, Tige, every dad-blamed word is right. A man won't get any bears, or cut much of a figger in Congress, if he lies when he don't have to. Come on, pup; I've got to bust it!"

THE men were lounging in the late afternoon sun in front of the cabin, smoking and lazily spinning yarns, when Skow leaped to his feet and exclaimed—

"Well, if here ain't Colonel Davie Crockett coming back for more fun!"

"He's waving something," cried Macon, springing up and running to meet the hunter.

"He's swinging all that's left of a perfectly rip-roarous two-gallon jug," yelled Crockett. Then as he drew nearer, "Talk of all the fool tricks! Why, even old Tige would 'a' know'd better! Had it in my right hand to carry safe, and then went to work and smashed it against a black oak and knocked the stuffing out of it. Skow, you find and fill another, and after I've rested a bit I'll take Tige and break his heart making him rustle after coons. They oughter be thick 'round here. I'd 'a' brought the bear pelt but it was getting smelly and I hung it in a tree."

"Please accept two gallons from me with my compliments," begged the judge.

"No, siree! When I have to have the creature given to me it'll be high time for me to quit," sharply retorted Crockett.

"That shows you've got some sense," grunted Brink.

"Then hurrah for me!" boisterously cried Crockett.

Hogan hunched forward and eyed the hunter gloomily.

"It's mighty little sense ye've got in that thick head of yers," he began. "Talk about shootin' coons to pay for it! Didn't ye win a prize for bestin' me at shootin'?"

The crowd shouted in merriment, and when he could make himself heard Crockett in honest amazement cried:

"And I never thought of it! Hogan, you may be a skunk, but I'm beginning to like you."

"Any one but a fool would 'a' remembered it," growled Hogan.

"Right, Hogan. I'm the fool. Think of Davie Crockett having ten dollars' credit laying 'round loose and forgetting it! Why, when I got married I only had fifteen dollars' worth of fixings in the whole cabin."

"You don't need to hustle 'round for coons when you want a jug filled here," Skow spoke up. "Colonel Crockett's word is good for anything I've got."

"Poor business," mumbled Brink, frowning.

"Come, that's mighty handsome of you. Suppose we have a little brought out as part payment on my prize. And while you boys are enjoying it I want the judge to step aside with me and give me a little advice. You all know how I lost everything I had last Spring in the freshet. What the freshet didn't take my creditors did. Left me bare as a hound's tooth. But, Judge, it ain't any money I'm after; just advice."

Having given the impression he wished to consult the judge on financial matters he led the way 'round the cabin, and whispered:

"It's gone. That's why I come back. Busted my jug for an excuse."

"Gone? What's gone, Colonel?"

"The dead body of Macon's Bull. Some one has toted it from the crick and hid it in one of them cracks left by the earthquake."

"Impossible!" gasped the judge.

"Not a bit. It shows that some members of Dick's gang are still hanging out in this region. It may be that one of them is stopping right now at this cabin."

"You astound me," faltered the judge. "Isn't there a chance of your being mistaken about finding the body. It was night and very dark. A log——"

"I had a torch. I pulled the body half out the water and see the scars on the wrist the foreman left. If I was idiot enough to make a mistake like that I'm the last man on earth to help you with your election," Crockett fiercely cut in. "Judge Curtes, there's devil's work going on in this neck of the woods, and I'm going to help you and your society to get at the bottom of it, or my name ain't Davie Crockett.

"Shifting the body proves that all the gang didn't crowd on to the Mississippi after killing the nigger. Some of them stopped 'round here. If they was shoving for the Arkansas side and didn't plan to work 'round here they'd never even bother to throw the body into the crick. Let them

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get into the Arkansas cane and they wouldn't give a hoot'n —— how soon it was found. But they've got a hiding-place near here, and they didn't want the body found. We'll say nothing to young Macon —not to any of them. We don't want to go off half-cocked. I'm going to stick 'round here till I've scouted the country and had a try at finding the gang's hiding-place."

"But it seems ridiculous to suspect any one now at the cabin being in the gang, unless it's one of the boatmen," protested the judge.

"Nothing's impossible, as the hungry bear said when he bit off his own paw. I've thought of Hogan, but the derned cuss seems more human since he made me remember the prize."

"I am completely bewildered," sighed the judge, his face now haggard.

"Well, we'll keep our mouths shet for a bit and see what turns up."

"Hi! Judge! Judge!" frantically yelled young Macon, running 'round the end of the cabin. "Oh, heavens! I shall go mad!"

"Judge Curtes, come back here, quick!" called Skow's voice.

Macon turned and ran back to the others, the judge and Crockett following. They were astounded to behold the young planter stamping back and forth, wringing his hands, his eyes glaring like a madman's. The other members of the group sat stiff and wordless, all gaping at a man on horseback.

"Jim! Jim! What is it? What's happened?" cried the judge.

Skow took the judge by the arm and pointed to the horseman. The judge caught the horse by the bridle and stared up into the man's face.

"Coombs!" he cried. "You've come from Jackson? You've brought—bad news?"

"Sent to find you," faltered Coombs. "Tillie's gone! Dis'peared! Stolen. Jackson folks are huntin' everywhere. Posse found a trail an' put the dawgs on to it an' follered it through the woods in this direction, then lost it. I've come on ahead to tell ye. Hardest job I ever done. The Jackson men 'low that some of Potter Dick's gang stole her along of yer formin' that —— society."

With an inarticulate cry Judge Curtes threw up his hands and would have fallen to the ground had not Crockett caught him in his arms.

CHAPTER IV

THE CAVE ON THE WILD TURKEY

THE receipt of Coombs' staggering news threw the trading-post into confusion. Only the efforts of Crockett, ably seconded by Skow and Brink, finally stilled young Macon's wild clamoring and aroused Judge Curtes from his terrible despair. Crockett gave it as his best opinion that the kidnapers had gone into hiding, after riding some twenty miles from Jackson, in a place carefully selected, and would plan to remain concealed until the posses exhausted their first mad energy in scouring the country.

"If Coombs is right about the trail leading this way they'll hide up in this neighborhood," he continued. "After the search has died down they'll start at night for the gang's headquarters, whether that be on the Arkansas side, or somewhere south of the Obion. It ain't on the Obion, as too many boatmen and some hunters are passing up and down the river. The outlaws planned every move, which means they're moving slow and sure. Chances are that Coombs in fetching the word here passed them and that we're all ahead of them. Now they can't make any profit by harming the girl, and profit is the only thing they're looking for."

"Good common sense!" indorsed Brink.

"They can have all I have. I'll agree to anything," the judge brokenly stated.

"Throw in my plantation—everything I have," groaned Macon.

"Time enough to dicker when they come to trade," said Crockett. "What we must do now is to comb the country to the north and south of this post. Skow had better head one party, Macon another, and I'll go it alone. It's too late for you to do much tonight, but I'll start and camp in the woods."

"I'll go with Skow," said Hicks.

Melver echoed his words. Brink harshly added himself to the party.

"That's enough for Skow," ruled Crockett. "Judge Curtes and the boatmen will go with Macon."

The young planter hastened to procure his rifle and pistols and would have dashed into the woods had not Crockett halted him and directed:

"Wait for your men. The boatmen know

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the country between here and the Obion. Spread out thin and do Injun work. If you find anything suspicious write a message on a piece of bark, if you haven't any paper, and send it to the cabin, where it'll be found, and read, and acted upon."

"Come on, boys," cried Macon. "Come on, Judge."

"If you go now you'll have to camp in the brush," warned Crockett.

"We'll camp in the brush," gritted Macon. "I'd camp in hell for the sake of getting a chance at that gang."

"Skow, that seems to leave the country to the south for you."

"Hicks and Melver and me are used to roughing it. Wouldn't it be better for Mr. Brink to stay here at the cabin to act on any message either party sends in?" said Skow.

"The cabin can run itself," testily informed Brink. "My friend's child is in peril. If you fear I'll be a handicap you're mistaken. I've been a land-looker for years."

Crockett wrinkled his nose in perplexity. Skow's words had convinced him some one should remain at the cabin.

"Either the judge or Brink sticks here," he announced.

"Nothing can keep me here. I go to find my girl," Judge Curtes declared.

"Then, Brink, it's you," ruled Crockett. "Let's have no words about it. It's a case of fitting in where you can do the most good."

Brink growled under his breath but surrendered. Coombs now spoke up and asked—

"Where do I fit in?"

"Ride back and tell the posse what we're doing," Skow directed. "Let them cut off any trails running south."

"Now we're all off in a bunch, as the fleas said when they swapped dogs. Don't try to travel during the night, or you'll tumble into some hole and break your necks. I'll scout by my lone," announced Crockett.

Calling his dog he soon buried himself in the forest, pushing ahead rapidly to make the most of the light. He had gone a mile when he heard steps behind him, and turned. To his surprize he beheld Hogan.

"Your posse must have started," he curtly reminded.

"What of it?" Ain't I caught up with it?" growled Hogan.

"Meaning me?" This in amazement.

"Git along! git along! Ye backwoods lummox!" was Hogan's reply.

"See here, my man, I don't take to your free and easy flow of language. You turn back to where you belong, or my name ain't Davie Crockett if I don't heave you there.'

Hogan dropped his rifle, pulled a knife from his belt and threw it on the ground, and jumped at the hunter. Like two wildcats they spun 'round and 'round and crashed to the ground to revolve like a wheel. Up they came to their feet again, and Crockett had his man by crotch and shoulder. With a mighty surge he shot him headfirst through a screen of bushes.

"That's one way of starting a posse into motion," he proudly told himself as he picked up his weapons and resumed his way.

To his great annoyance he had gone but a few rods before Hogan burst through the undergrowth and bore down on him, yelling:

"I know how ye do it now, ye —— mudfish. But ye can't do it ag'in."

For the second time he discarded his weapons and plunged at the hunter.

Deeply irritated at having his work delayed by the boatman's perseverance Crockett this time met his man half-way and leaped into the air with him. A terrific confusion of flying limbs finally settled down into a still picture of the hunter plastering his opponent against a tree, where he held him helpless. Suddenly shifting a hand to the tow-colored hair Crockett began bumping the Irishman's head methodically against the trunk.

"I quit!" groaned Hogan after an unusually vicious thump.

"Then go!" ordered Crockett, releasing him. "You'll get me all het up in a minute and I'll be tempted to do you a desperate injury. Next time I sink my hooks into you it won't be any boy's play."

Hogan carefully felt of the knobs on the back of his head and surveyed the bear-hunter admiringly.

"I've quit," he repeated. "But I can't understand how a freak from the cane, like ye are, can do it. Man, ye'd figger big even at Natchez-under-the-hill. I made up me mind I'd go with ye if ye was a better man than me, which seems to be the case. I'm ready. Lead the way."

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"Lead the way? You skunk!" fumed Crockett. "Think I'm going to take you back to the cabin?"

"Never a bit. Ye're goin' to take me along with ye," corrected Hogan, his bruised lips twisting into an ugly grin. "But, man, man! If I had yer pretty knack of keel-haulin' I'd be no hunter in this God-forsaken place. I'd be a shinin' light in Congress, with a record of throwin' every one, from the President down. I thought it was only a trick that I could learn in time if I kept at it. Now I see it's a gift, like writin' verses an' makin' love. I'm beat. I'll foller ye, an' take orders."

Crockett, staring blankly during this recital, now collapsed at the foot of a tree and laughed heartily.

"You'll be the death of me," he choked. "It's worse'n being tickled by a bear. All right. Since you seem to feel so sure you're right, we'll go ahead."

As they penetrated the broken country to the southwest the hunter had no fault to find with Hogan's qualities as a woodsman. He moved easily and kept at Crockett's heels, and occasionally made shrewd observations.

"That dawg of yers seems to be a knowin' brute," he remarked as they halted for their second wind. "Could ye ding it into his head to help us find the trail?"

Crockett whistled and Tige came back to learn what was wanted. Crockett caught him by the ears and shook him into a stage of keen attention.

"No bears, Tige," he commanded. "Men. Horses. Now, sic 'em!" Then to Hogan as the dog went ahead, "Best I could do. He knows he's not to trifle with bears and that I want something else. He's too all-fired proud to fuss with any game below bears. That leaves him a man's trail."

FOLLOWING the dog they ranged back and forth among the holes and hollows, warily crossing deep fissures hidden by rotting vegetation, and uncovering more than one cave masked by curtains of vines. On every hand there were hiding places enough for an army. At last the hopelessness of investigating any great number of them was realized by Crockett. Halting, he announced:

"I'm a fool. You're a fool. You're not so big a one as me as you're not expected to know the woods as I do. But we're going blind. Wherever the gang dens up will be a place that's well hid and handy to water, and where they can get to it on horses. We're wasting time hunting among these holes. Let's 'low we was the villains and wanted to run the girl out the country. We'd cross the Mississippi to the Arkansas side. If we was hard pressed and not hindered by the girl we'd push through to the Obion.

"But if we was hampered by the girl we'd strike into the old Injun trail that runs from Jackson down to Memphis. We'd follow that till we come to Wild Turkey Crick, which flows into the Forked Deer. The crick is the likeliest place to break a journey, and the trail leading to it ain't only a few miles from here. There's some hundred-foot cliffs along one side of the crick, and they must be punched full of holes. I was down that way last year to look at some pictures on the rocks left by the old Injuns."

"Can ye pick up that trail, man Crockett?" eagerly asked Hogan.

"Somewhat," dryly replied the hunter. "But it's getting too dark to scout through this mess. We'll camp here and wait till the first light of morning."

They bivouacked in the bush and managed to snatch a few hours' sleep before Crockett roused up and through the mists discerned a gray streak in the eastern sky. Awakening his companion he produced some dried meat from his pouch and found a spring. After hastily swallowing their food he called the dog to his side and struck off south.

"That gang is doing its traveling by night if they're following the Injun path," he said as they hurried on. "If they've got ahead of us during the night I can mighty soon tell. Then we'll press on after them at top speed."

The sun was three hours up when he broke through the last barrier and dropped beside a deeply worn path that wound in and out through forest and opening.

"Think how many Injun moccasins it took to wear that down," he mused.

"I'm thinking of Wild Turkey Crick," grunted Hogan.

Crockett nodded approvingly and proceeded to examine the trail. There were no signs of recent travel. Not a hoof-mark was to be found. To clinch his conviction

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he put the hound to work, but the animal only whined helplessly.

"That means we can take our time," Crockett said. "We're ahead of them."

They proceeded leisurely for some five or six miles, then halted where the trail forded a shallow creek.

"This is it," said Crockett. "There's the cliffs." And he pointed to a limestone formation that towered a hundred feet above the water. "At high water the crick washes right against the rock, but now we can have plenty of room to walk 'long the base. Bushes and driftwood will make it hard footing, in spots."

Wading the stream they turned and followed the bank and found their way quite clear of obstacles.

"Easy for them to fetch their horses in here," Crockett commented.

The dog prowling along the base of the cliff began barking and whining, and, hastening to him, Hogan, ahead, called out—

"The pup's found where they keep their hosses."

It was a round opening in the rock, a circular vault large enough to accommodate a dozen animals. A slight incline of wash and pebbles furnished an excellent entrance. After their eyes grew accustomed to the gloom they observed a quantity of coarse grass heaped up at one side. Crockett examined this and said it had been cut within a month and taken in before it was entirely cured.

"They went at it business-fashion," he added. "They must 'a' 'lowed to use this place regular."

"But would they keep the girl here, man Davie?" asked Hogan.

Crockett shook his head and walked outside and began scanning the high wall.

"They'd keep her near, but probably in a hole higher up."

The dog dashed between them and began scrambling up a cleft that ran diagonally across the face of the cliff, the work of ancient days or the earthquake. From top to bottom a huge section of the rock had been split and pushed outward a few feet. Into this crevice boulders and dislodged trees had fallen until a steep path was formed. Tige valiantly conquered the incline for a distance of three-score feet and then abruptly vanished from view.

"Found a hole in the path and fell through," gasped Crockett. "That stuff probably lodged when half-way to the bottom. If Tige hit a hole he's dropped clear down into a living tomb."

"There he is!" cried Hogan, pointing to the dog's head appearing in sight. "He's barkin'."

"He says for us to come up!" Crockett interpreted.

But before attempting to ascend the steep way he scrutinized it carefully and made sure none but the dog had scrambled up the path.

It was a jumble of rocks and decaying tree-trunks, all sown with small bushes. To fall through the floor of the path must mean a hideous death, and the two tested each foot of the way before advancing.

"Pretty hard trail to tote a prisoner over," puffed Crockett, as he clung to some bushes and thrust back his leg for Hogan's benefit. "Don't stop. Climb right up over me."

"There must be another door," said Hogan, as Crockett seized his heels and pulled himself upward.

On reaching the point where the dog had disappeared they discovered a low opening in the solid rock and heard him whining inside. Gathering some dry limbs from underfoot, Crockett struck a light with his steel and flint and succeeded in igniting his torch. Thrusting this ahead of him, he entered the opening with Hogan close behind him. The two found themselves at the top of a thirty-foot slope of smooth rock, which extended to the level floor of a wide chamber. Descending this Crockett swung his torch and gave a low "Whoop" of triumph.

Several saddles rested against one side of the chamber. Middlings of bacon and dried meat hung on lines suspended between jagged points of rock. There also was a small keg, which they knew contained gunpowder. It was flanked by several jugs which, a sniff of each told, contained whisky. A half-dozen rifles and as many pistols and a large number of long knives formed a little armory. At the back of the cave was an opening, some ten feet in width and extending to the rock ceiling.

"The back door!" said Hogan, pointing to it.

Crockett advanced the torch but soon found his way barred. Once through the opening they found themselves on a narrow platform, extending far into the cliff in

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either direction and terminating in front in a wide chasm. Near the edge of the chasm they found a keg fitted with a rawhide bail across the top. A long length of rope made fast to the bail told them it was utilized for a bucket. Holding the torch over the chasm Crockett saw it reflected in a dark current below.

"They don't have to git water from the crick," remarked Hogan. "They just drop the keg an' tap that."

"Some spring that flows into the crick," mused Crockett. "It's one of the gang's hiding-places all right. We're ahead of them. We're in the nest; now for the birds."

"Do we stay an' wait for 'em, or go back an' tell t'others?" asked Hogan. "Man Davie, I'm free to say I'm for stickin'."

"If it wa'n't for the girl I'd rather stay and give them a party than to eat. But as I 'low they won't risk coming here only at night, and as that gives us time to go back and fetch help, I 'low we'd better go. If they come while we was here and we pitched in and didn't rub them all out on the jump they wouldn't be above killing the girl to remove her as a witness. A great Murel trick. That's why they killed Macon's Bull."

"Killed Macon's Bull? What d'ye mean? How do ye know that?" sharply demanded Hogan.

Crockett shifted the torch to illuminate the boatman's face, and slowly replied:

"They always did kill niggers that wasn't willing to play their game. Young Macon's Bull was stolen. Macon says they never could get him any distance alive. He ain't come back to the plantation. So, they must have killed him."

Hogan's expression grew dull and stupid.

"So that's how ye figger it, eh?" he mumbled. "Wal, prob'ly they did do for him."

CROCKETT now grew curious as to the supplies, and rummaged among them without changing their order. A pair of saddle-bags held his attention and he opened them. One flap was empty but in the other he found several sheets of paper filled with writing. Hogan exclaimed under his breath and eagerly whispered—

"Read it!"

"You read it," said Crockett. "I had six months' schooling and quit after trailing through my speller as far as crucifix. From A to C I'm a howler. Beyond C finds me limping."

Hogan snatched the papers and slowly read:

"Black Joe. St. Julian's, Mar. 20. Evander, May 10. Lafrance, June 1. Dogs. Dismissed, June 5. $2,400."

"St. Julian's plantation is back of Natchez. Evander has a big place a few miles out of Greenville. I don't remember Lafrance," murmured Crockett.

"Five miles below the Walnut Hills," promptly supplied Hogan. "I seen reward signs posted all along the river for Black Joe. He belonged to the Sharpe family down at Monticello in Lawrence County. It's all easy from that writin'. These devils got him to run away. Promised to give him money and put him in a free State if he'd let them sell him first. They sold him three times, man Davie, inside of three months."

"And he was chased by dogs when he lit out from the Lafrance place. He must 'a' led the dogs right up to where these varments was waiting for him. So they 'dismissed' him—killed him—to hide the evidence. Killed him after cleaning up twenty-four hundred dollars from the hellish business," gritted Crockett.

"Think of their keepin' books like a shop-trader!" grunted Hogan.

Crockett took the paper and without trying to spell out the words stared at the writing in silence for nearly a minute.

"I've got it now. I'll know that hand of fist wherever I see it, just like I'd know a trail in the thickest woods. I've got all the signs marked in my head. I even begin to get a picture of the man who wrote it. He's a cold devil! Still, there's some one above him he has to make these reports for. What's the next?"

Hogan read:

"Little Sambo. House S. Evereth's, St. Stephens. May 20. Refused. Dismissed May 30. $1,200."

"That'll be meaning he was a house servant. Liked his new home so well he wouldn't run away again. They 'dismissed' him on the spot, afraid he'd tell things," translated Crockett.

"Black Joe was worked by a Mississippi River gang. There was another gang workin' in Alabama. They must 'a' 'lowed

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to take Sambo up to the Tombigbee an' Black Warrior, an' into this State by follerin' the Tennessee River, sellin' him whenever they had a chance. He was prob'ly told at first they was takin' him to Ohio, where he'd be free. But he liked his new master, or got skeered," said Hogan.

"And you'll notice they don't bother to give the owner's name," Crockett pointed out.

The remainder of the list was largely a repetition of this hideous procedure; and Crockett's soul sickened, then flamed with terrible anger, as he comprehended the wide scope of the gang's activities. One entry read:

Monson Howard. St. Francisville. New Orleans packet. Fell overboard. $5,000.

"He was a passenger on the *Southern Belle*," informed Hogan. "She passed our string of boats. We was told he'd fell overboard and was asked to keep watch for his body. The bloody devils knifed him for his gold an' weighted him down an' threw him into the river."

Other items suggested the wholesale theft of live-stock, of small river-craft, and of burglaries. But the essence of the record in its entirety was black murder. There was something so atrociously cold-blooded about the careful entries that even the bear-hunter, boyishly naive in his reckless courage, felt oppressed by the atmosphere of the cave. One item in particular stirred his gorge, when he learned that the victim was "dismissed" before any inquiry had been made as to his financial status. Less than ten dollars were secured by the murderers; yet the item was duly entered on the record.

"Ugh! It makes me feel sick to my stomach. Let's get out of here and see about finding the girl before she's 'dismissed,' " said Crockett.

"We oughter take these papers," urged Hogan. "They'll be sure to be fine evidence ag'in' the gang; may the devil git them!"

"And they'll know some one has been here and holds face-cards the minute they find the papers missing," warned Crockett. "Still we oughter take something as proof. Here! We'll take one sheet. That'll be as good as a hundred. Then they'll figger it got lost. They'll reason that if any one ransacked the saddle-bags they'd take all. One missing will set them worrying, but it won't make them scatter."

"It's a head ye've got on yer shoulders, man Davie," admired Hogan, folding two sheets preparatory to returning them.

Suddenly he paused and exclaimed under his breath, and pointed to some writing at the bottom of the last page, and read:

"Bull. Sept. 1. No good. Dismissed."

"Ye had it right, man Davie. Macon's Bull was dismissed," he gravely added.

"Every one knows how Murel's old gang worked. Any one could figger how Potter Dick, Murel's right-hand man, would keep up the game. It was common talk at Skow's night 'fore last."

"Still it was a good guess. But if we're to make the cabin an' bring back some of the men to watch this place we'd best be goin'. "

Crockett gained the opening and crawled through and carefully buried the fragments of the torch. Down below he glimpsed Tige racing among the bushes and betraying excitement. He whistled to him, then picked up his rifle and began the hazardous descent.

When nearly at the bottom he felt, rather than heard, some one close behind him. He was about to warn Hogan not to slip and fall against him, when instinct warned him to be on his guard. He sprang forward and received a glancing blow on the skull that knocked him senseless and sent him rolling and bumping down the rocks into some berry-bushes.

His hard head, protected by the thick thatch of hair and the fur hat, saved him from a fractured brainpan. He became vaguely conscious that he was still alive, but for a moment was unable to tell what he was or where he was. By degrees his personality came back to him. He was the only original Davie Crockett, and something had hurt him. He did not attempt to move, not yet being fully conscious of his predicament. In a hazy way he decided to call young Abraham Henry to come and help him.

Then he began moving, and briars caught in his deerskin clothing and scratched his face. He sensed no pain, nor was he curious to know what the strange locomotion meant. A slight pause, and he discovered something about him ached. After what seemed an eternity of blind groping he localized the ache as being

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in his head. At this juncture he was propelled roughly across a shelf of rock, rolling as limply as a bag of meal, and splashed down into the creek. With the first mouthful of water the instinct of self-preservation shocked him to wakefulness and defensive efforts. And he fancied that he heard a gun fired and the echo of a scream.

CHAPTER V

HOW HICKS WAS "DISMISSED"

IT WAS not until he had gained the bank that the hunter's senses cleared. He had no idea how long he had battled to save himself. Blind instinct had restrained him from gulping down the waters of the creek and drowning. A "civilized" man, similarly situated, would have been quickly asphyxiated. But Crockett, the strenuously optimistic, surcharged with dynamic qualities—among which must be reckoned honesty—possessed a soul that fought for him when his material senses were deadened. When he opened his eyes his head and shoulders were resting on the bank under some bushes while the lower part of his body remained submerged. His first coherent thought was that he had been struck down by Hogan and left for dead.

He began to understand why the boatman had persisted in accompanying him. He was one of Potter Dick's men and from the start had feared the inquisitiveness of the bear-hunter. Undoubtedly Rance, Tebbets and Croper belonged to the gang. Their occupation would permit them to bring runaway slaves up the river unsuspected. He could understand that for Dick to maintain a widespread organization for robbery and murder various bands of workers would be necessary, and each unit must be engaged, on the surface at least, in some legitimate business.

He smiled grimly at his first appraisal of the crime syndicate. He had childishly pictured desperate men riding under cover of night to strike and to escape. Now he knew how erroneous this conception had been. Every man furthering Dick's black plans would be ostensibly employed in some honest work, going and coming over the same route. Each band would be well known to every one in its particular territory and would acquire a thorough knowledge of the country. This would primarily include a careful inventory of every prospective victim's assets.

He believed Hogan spoke truthfully in describing how one gang worked in Alabama and others on different sections of the Mississippi. With murder in his heart Hogan could well afford to tell the truth. The hunter easily constructed Dick's mode of procedure. Separate units minimized the danger of detection.

Crockett readily appreciated the value of having a Tennessee terminus for the Tombigbee River unit. This gang would report to some "head" in Tennessee, most likely a citizen above suspicion. His home would mark the ending of the Alabama activities. From it would also branch out the routes of those units working overland to Memphis by the old trail, and down the Obion to another head on the Mississippi.

If the members of one gang were brought to book only one link in the chain would be eliminated. Men in unit A knew nothing of the identity of those composing unit B, and so on. A head would have only a partial knowledge of other heads. Each head was a junction point where different lines terminated. In event of a head's capture the supreme head, Potter Dick, would see to it he broke jail and escaped the country, or was bought off in court, or, in the last event where confession was feared, be "dismissed."

With new shrewdness, or because his strong mind was working unhampered, Crockett visioned all this, and was firmly convinced he had discovered Dick's methods.

"If it's as wide-spread as I'm 'lowing the only way to bust up the varments is to trap the fellow that handles the business of two gangs, the skunk that receives from one and sends off by another. Such a critter at least must know all the men in the different gangs reporting to him. Well, that snake of a Hogan led me along like I was a young bear running to a honey-tree!"

The creek became alive with the splash of falling rain. The hunter cautiously drew himself ashore. Hogan might be in the neighborhood. For weapons he had his knife; and a spasm of regret brought an ugly grimace to his strong features as he sensed the loss of Old Betsy. This thought caused him to remember the dog, and he wondered why the faithful animal had not found him.

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A faint rustling in the bushes up-stream put an end to his puzzled meditations. Flattening out on his stomach he found a peep-hole in his covert, and trembled with rage on beholding Hogan. The boatman carried a rifle in one hand and a long sapling in the other. He was studying the rain-splashed surface of the creek and using the sapling as a pole for prodding the depths. Some thirty feet from Crockett he laid aside his rifle and betrayed excitement as he wielded the pole with both hands. So intent did he become with his strange fishing that the hunter would have stolen upon him, armed with the knife, had it not been for the thick barrier of berry-bushes. The way was open along the edge of the creek, but to enter that would mean his immediate discovery.

"Now what in sin has he found?" murmured the hunter.

Up came the pole with a bedraggled object on the end. It was Crockett's fur hat. Hogan examined it briefly and thrust it under a bolder and resumed his explorations.

"He 'lows my carcass is at the bottom of the crick and he wants to locate it and make sure it don't come gallivanting to the surface," Crockett gritted.

Suddenly Hogan ceased his efforts and moved up-stream and entered the bushes. The rain lessened and the hunter heard a sound as though a heavy body was being dragged through the brush.

"Now what can that devil be up to?" Crockett puzzled. "Sounds like he was bushing a trail. And where in Tophet is old Tige?"

There was a brief period of silence, broken only by the desultory patter of raindrops on the bushes; then with the abruptness of a fantom Hogan reappeared on the bank. Crockett groaned and cursed under his breath. The boatman was now carrying two rifles, and one of them was Old Betsy. With a final scrutiny of the creek and its shores the boatman hurried up-stream, springing from rock to rock along the water's edge to escape the wet foliage. He departed as one going on a definite errand.

"He's cleared out—the varment!" Crockett raged.

Yet he remained in hiding for nearly an hour, spending the time in wondering what had become of the dog.

At last, convinced Hogan was really gone, he hurriedly recovered his hat from under the rock and made for the cave. Despite his most careful efforts he would slip occasionally on the rough path and dislodge miniature avalanches of twigs and rocks. Each time this occurred he threw himself prostrate and waited. Hogan had gone for good, however, for none of the alarms brought him to the foot of the path to investigate.

With a deep breath of relief Crockett finally crawled through the low opening and glided down to the floor of the cave. He staggered through the darkness to where the weapons were stacked. His horn of powder was water-proof and by sense of touch alone he selected a rifle and proceeded to load it. He also appropriated a pistol with a long, rifled barrel, most excellent for precise shooting and quite unlike any he had ever seen. Fully armed he returned to the mouth of the cave, divided between a burning hunger for revenge and a deep sense of duty to the weak.

If he followed Hogan he believed he could overtake him. Once he found him he knew he should kill him; never a doubt as to that. It was what he desired above all else. But it was midday, and if he slaked his vengeance he would not be able to report his discovery to the trading-post in time to promote the rescue of Tillie Curtes, should the outlaws bring her to the cave that night. To reach the cabin and round up the men and guide them to the cave before night set in would be a momentous task. They might not be at the cabin. Or they might be exhausted by their strenuous efforts and would be slow to move.

Still undecided as to his course he slipped down the path. The absence of the dog troubled him when he paused to give the matter a thought. Next he recalled Hogan's mysterious movements while hidden in the bushes. Leaving his choice of initiative in abeyance for the time he soon gained the spot where the boatman had quit the bank to plunge into the undergrowth. He worked his way through the dripping foliage and observed how the heavy rain had flattened the bushes to a degree that concealed any signs of a fresh trail.

Crawling on his hands and knees he concentrated his attention to the ground and at last detected two faint, parallel lines close together. At times he lost them but

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always picked them up again. Painstakingly stalking the tell-tale clues he followed them until brought to a halt at the edge of a deep crack. It extended from the creek to the cliff and he could hear the gurgling of water at the bottom of it. On each side the rank-growing bushes protected it from casual discovery.

CROCKETT thrust his head over the edge and discovered the depth was about ten feet. Slinging the rifle over his shoulder he quickly descended and stood knee-deep in the current. Splashing toward the cliff his feet encountered something. Thrusting down his hand he pulled up a rifle. The next minute he was stumbling over something lodged on a rock. His hands told him it was a human body clad in deerskin.

Bending low he was startled to find himself staring into the countenance of Hicks. The dead man had been stabbed through the throat. His heels had made the two lines as his murderer dragged him to the crevice. For the first time Crockett recalled the faintly registered impression of the scream his dull ears had caught after he was hurled into the water.

"Blood-thirsty as a painter!" he muttered. "Done for me, as he reckoned, and had just thrown me into the crick when Hicks come upon him. Hicks must 'a' fired at him, missing. Then he stabbed the poor cuss as quick as a cat. Well, I'll hump back to the cabin and report progress, as we used to say in the Legislature."

His discoveries were not concluded, however, for as he turned to climb up the rocks he tripped over the body of Tige.

"Poor old pup!" he groaned, fondling the hound's head. "So he done for you, too! It wa'n't Hicks' gun I heard. It was his, when he done for you. Well, Tige, we've had lots of fun together. Now you've chased your last bear. Pup, I'm going to get him for this. He may 'lowed he had a reason for 'dismissing' me, but he couldn't have anything against you, old boy."

He found a shelf in the wall above the wash of the current and tenderly placed the dead dog upon it.

"Blood-thirsty as a painter!" he repeated as he maneuvered to find an easy spot to climb out.

He had now worked in quite near the cliff and his eyes were accustomed to the gloom; and he was surprized to discern a dark opening. He possessed, in a marked degree, the primitive man's curiosity. That he had been assaulted most foully and left for dead, that he had discovered the murdered remains of two other victims, could not smother the sudden desire to learn what was inside the hole. Such was the pioneer man's temperament on all frontiers. Each horizon was a temptation, decoying him to seek the rim of the world and gaze beyond. Crockett tightened his belt and waded in under the cliff.

As he advanced the half-light deepened to blackness. The channel was full of holes. At times he waded waist-deep, and again with the water barely covering his ankles. Moving warily to escape a ducking he followed the under-ground stream through the inky darkness, and by extending his rifle found himself at all times able to touch the two walls.

He quickly formed fresh deductions: the men using the cave must know of this water-course; there was the keg used as a bucket. Pressing closer to the wall on his left he brushed it with his fingers as he advanced and at last found a rope. A second examination disclosed a second rope with sticks between. Pulling on the ladder to test its strength he proceeded to climb up it and gained a flat shelf.

Reaching about with his rifle to guard against a plunge into some abyss he hit something that moved away. Automatically he cocked his rifle, then grunted in shame. It was the keg. He had found the second entrance to the cave and it led to within a dozen feet of the spot he and Hogan had visited.

"Bet he was watching me like a hawk to see if I found that ladder. If I had I'd probably started down it and been cracked over the head; and that would 'a' been the end of Davie Crockett."

Feeling along the partition until he came to the opening into the main cave he entered and took time to form his plans. It was too late to pursue Hogan if he would return to the trading-post before night. Hogan, however, would stick to his natural environment, the river; just as the bears stuck to the canebrake. When he had time he would go after the boatman. The only problem demanding his immediate attention was that of the girl.

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Crouching on his heels he turned it all over in his mind and viewed it from all angles. He observed he was always coming back to the same conclusion; the gang was sure to bring the girl to the cave. He scrambled up the slope to the exit and looked out on a dismal Autumnal downpour. The renewal of the storm decided him. Instead of returning to the cabin to summon help he would remain alone and await the coming of the gang.

Committed to this plan, he carried the firearms to the mouth of the cave and quickly loaded them. He knew success depended upon his taking the outlaws by surprize. Gathering up the arms, he lugged them through the rear opening and deposited them on the shelf overhanging the subterranean stream. He selected this position as guarding both entrances to the cave. The kidnapers' first move on gaining the cave would be to light a fire. Once they did this he would have them at his mercy.

"And if the Lord is good to me Hogan will be with them," he told himself.

Now he felt at liberty to procure some of the dried meat and to sample one of the jugs; but although his clothing was wet he did not venture to start a blaze. Finding some blankets he wrapped them about him and laid down to sleep, depending on his woodsman's faculty of awaking at the least approach of danger.

The night passed with nothing occurring to disturb his rest. He was greatly chagrined when he opened his eyes and realized his time had been wasted. Snatching a few mouthfuls of the meat he reconnoitered the creek from the mouth of the cave without discovering any signs.

The storm had passed and the sun invited him to emerge and enjoy its warmth. Taking a rifle he swung down the rope ladder and followed the stream to the creek. Hogan would rejoin his mates and assure them the secret of the cave was safe. Assuming the other three boatmen were Dick's men this would necessitate Hogan's return to the trading-post. He would be believed readily when he told Judge Curtes and Brink that he had become separated from Crockett.

"And by the time my friends get curious over my failure to return Hogan will be off and away, Hogan figgers."

This possibility of finding the boatmen at the post was a keen spur to the hunter's heels, and he lost no time in gaining the old trail where it crossed the creek.

Moving at a swinging trot along the ancient path he kept watch with ears and eyes. He had not believed the outlaws would risk a daylight trip, but their failure to make the cave during the night left him in a quandary. He did not care to believe his trip to the cave was a wild-goose chase and that the kidnapers had no intention of using it. Such a conclusion would mean they purposed traveling down the Obion and that they might be well advanced on their journey by this time.

In this connection he analyzed Hicks' death and the attack on himself. If Hicks could blunder on to the spot, why not the others? Wasn't it logical to assume Hogan had sped back to change the line of flight in fear that Hicks' friends were nearby and might encounter the outlaws as they made for the cave? The slightest chance of discovery would send the gang off at right-angles, for in all probability there were many such hiding-places scattered throughout the desolate country.

"Fool! Fool!" Crockett exclaimed and increasing his pace. "The boatmen were to receive the girl from the gang that stole her. She was to be handed over by the Alabama gang at some point near the trading-post. Hogan and his men were to take her on their boat and carry her across to the Arkansas side. A seat in Congress against a middling of bacon that when I make the cabin I'll find that not one of the four boatmen is there! Hogan was afraid of me and kept with me till he could fetch me a crack over the head. The girl's changed hands by this time, and I've been very polite in keeping from under-foot! But I'll pay them out if I chase them to Mexico. I'll pay them out for the girl, for Hicks, and then I'll heap up the measure, account of old Tige and Old Betsy."

The sun was at the meridian when the hunter reached a point that gave him a clear view of the cabin. Judge Curtes sat on the door-sill with his head in his hands, a pathetic figure. Young Macon staggered back and forth, scarcely able to drag one foot after the other. Melver and Skow were stretched on their backs with their hats over their faces as if asleep. Through the window Crockett glimpsed Brink seated

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at the table, eating. There was no sign of Hogan and his three mates.

Leaving his place of concealment Crockett gained the group before any one discovered him.

"Where'd you drop from, Colonel?" cried Skow, sitting up.

"Any news?" hoarsely demanded Macon, seizing his arm.

The judge lifted his haggard face and read Crockett's answer in a glance, and with a groan dropped his head.

"I haven't anything hopeful to report," Crockett sorrowfully replied, deciding to say nothing about the cave for fear it would start young Macon and the judge off on a useless errand. "Lost my dog, too. Where's Hogan? We separated."

"Ain't seen hide nor hair of him. Hicks ain't showed up yet, neither," yawned Melver. "We put in night 'fore last, all day yesterday, an' last night. I'm jest plumb tuckered out."

"Where's Rance, Tebbets and Croper?"

"Gone to earn five hundred dollars," Macon replied with an ugly laugh. "Quit us cold when it began to rain yesterday. I offered them anyting to stay and help."

Brink now appeared in the doorway and with a nod of welcome to Crockett, reminded:

"The boatmen were under contract to make the post at McLemone's Bluff as soon as possible. The five hundred freight money they receive is only a part of what's involved. After they deliver their cargo they'll come back to help us, I'm sure."

"Yes, yes. I must carry my own cross," Judge Curtes moaned. "We'll be just to them, Jim, even in our great affliction. They worked hard till the rain came. Then they knew the Obion would rise. If they didn't take advantage of the high water at once they'd be too late. It was their duty to deliver the goods according to contract. And they promised to spread the alarm along the Obion."

"—— their duty when a Tennessee girl is held prisoner by dirty cut-throats!" Macon passionately shouted.

"Amen!" cried Skow, smashing his fists together.

"Davie Crockett agrees with that sentiment all the way," quietly approved Crockett. "But I'm surprized they didn't wait for Hogan."

"Perhaps they met him. But it was a case of hurry with them. River'll be up for a day and then down again," Brink remarked.

CROCKETT went inside and secured a dish of meat and listened to the experience of the two posses while he ate. Skow's party had penetrated far south and had found nothing.

"Yesterday morning Hicks quit us, saying he'd take a little scout to one side. We had to come home without him. But where can he be? I'll begin to think he did find something if he keeps out much longer," Skow concluded.

It was on Crockett's tongue to tell them they need not look for Hicks to return, but he feared for the effect on Macon and the judge, both now worn to a rag from grief and fear.

Macon began babbling:

"We went north. We went miles. We stayed out all night and took up the hunt in the morning. We poked into every hole. Rance and the others stuck to it till it began to rain. Then they got uneasy. Tebbets wanted to wait for Hogan. Rance was for going to the river, saying the three of them could put the boat through at a pinch and pick Hogan up on the way down if he didn't overtake them. The judge and I came back alone.

"If I could only get in touch with the —— villains I'd sign over my plantation. I'll give everything I possess to get Tillie out of their clutches. If something don't turn up mighty soon I'm going through the woods shouting my offer. Yes, I'll go alone. Perhaps they won't be afraid to meet one man. By heavens! I'll start now!"

He was off on a staggering run for the woods, but Brink and Crockett overtook him.

"Come back, you young fool," growled Brink. "This is no way to help Miss Curtes. They'd shoot you on sight, fearing a trap. Try to calm yourself long enough to hear some good advice from a man old enough to be your father. Miss Curtes was stolen for the sake of ransom. Potter Dick won't stop to negotiate for her return until he believes he has her where she can't be found. If we press him too close it's very possible he will kill her. Am I right, Colonel?"

"They'll dismiss—dispose of her. Mr.

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Brink, you've hit the peg on the head. This running 'round on a chance of finding the gang won't help the girl any. We made a mistake in starting out as we did to scour the woods. The job oughter been left to me and Skow, or Melver—some one who knows the woods. Throw a thousand men into the bush and they'd find nothing."

"I'm glad you agree with me, Colonel. Now, Macon, and you, Judge, listen. Dick wants money. He doesn't want the girl. If we stop this 'running 'round' the colonel speaks of, Judge Curtes will receive notice, saying how much it will cost him to get the girl back. If Macon keeps quiet he may not be assessed. And after all, it's nice to have something to live on. If the judge is to be stripped all the more reason why his daughter's husband should have a home to offer him."

"That's good talk," Crockett indorsed.

"Then let them send word at once," the judge sobbed.

"So do all of us say, Jedge," soothed Skow.

"And when they do I'll be glad to be the go-between. I'll sign a contract to eat my shirt if they get the price without my getting the girl," Crockett loudly declared.

"Then there is nothing to do but wait?" Macon asked.

"That's all," Crockett assured. "Wait till they're satisfied they're not being chased. If any likely signs turn up I can slip out and look them over without any of the gang being any the wiser. The rest of you just stick close. Now let's get rid of the blue devils and be fit for the job when the time comes."

Brink reached inside the door and brought forth a jug, and solemnly said:

"Colonel Crockett, such sensible sentiments would inspire me to drink if anything could. Anyway, I'll pour for the rest of you. You all look as if you needed it."

CHAPTER VI

THE RACE TO THE OBION

AFTER rolling up in his blanket Crockett remained awake long enough to review the exciting events of the past forty-eight hours and to analyze more carefully the kidnaping plot. He had been slightly surprized on encountering Hogan and his three mates in the woods, although their reason for leaving their boat was plausible.

The Obion was low and boats bound for McLemone's Bluff were frequently delayed for several days while waiting for a heavy rain to submerge the windfall fifteen miles above the Crockett cabin. The four men were approaching from the south when he first saw them. Without any suspicions he had accepted their statement about crossing the blazed trail and getting off their course in their search for the new trading-post.

It was obvious they had returned from the creek in the ravine, and had gone there to bury Macon's Bull in the fissure. The four had made easy work of the grim burial, and it was while returning to follow the blazed trail to the post that they had run upon him butchering the deer.

"I'll be choked on high tariff if it don't all fit in," Crockett told himself.

Next he considered the advisability of informing his friends about the cave and the slaying of Hicks. From what he had witnessed of the judge's despair and young Macon's frantic state of mind he was glad he had told them nothing. Ultimately he must tell them, but for the present there was nothing to gain and much to lose. He would have told Skow, only he feared lest his rage at the death of Hicks would blind him to the interests of the girl. Brink was master of his emotion and would be a safe repository for the secret; but Brink alone could do nothing. Did he pass the news on to Melver it quickly would be retailed to all.

"Time enough to tell when I find the telling will help us out and not distract our attention. If I'd told them today they'd all be rushing to the cave before this, thinking the girl was sure to be fetched there. And I know the gang will take her to the Mississippi and into Arkansas. If they'd had the cave in mind as a hiding-place Hogan would 'a' come back there last night, after 'dismissing' Hicks and, as he 'lowed, Davie Crockett. No; the cave ain't to be used on this job. That's why Hogan skun out, and the Obion is the only way he could go."

Satisfied with this line of reasoning Crockett put the whole matter out his mind and decided to sleep. Within a minute he was deep in slumber.

He awoke, standing upright in the middle of the floor, the shrill scream of a woman

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ringing in his ears. The explosion of fire-arms, two shots fired in quick succession, filled the room. He heard Brink calling:

"Colonel Crockett! Outside and after them!"

By this time Melver and Skow were awake and swearing loudly as they sought their arms in the darkness, while the judge piteously begged for some one to tell him what it all meant. Crockett, who had slept with his rifle at his side, glided through the door. Brink followed at his heels, barking:

"The edge of the woods! I fired twice with my pistols. Think I shot one!"

Crockett dashed for the forest, the graying east marking the approach of dawn. By the time he burst through the wet bushes he could visualize the whole drama. The gang had remained in hiding somewhere between Jackson and the post, and was risking a night trip by the cabin as the most direct route to the Obion. Instead of making for the river after his double crime at the cave Hogan had hastened to join the gang and guide the kidnapers by the shortest route to the boat. Once they got the girl aboard there would be no further attempt to make McLemone's Bluff. The boat would drop down-stream and into the Mississippi.

"It'll always stick in my craw if I miss her now, after she's been fetched so near," he gritted. "Sounded as if she was right under the winder. And Hogan'll be with them! If I ain't got a rod in pickle for that skunk!"

Excited cries and queries from the cabin made the hunter curse softly until he remembered that the scream and the two pistol-shots must have warned the gang their presence was discovered. He heard Brink ordering the men into the bush and urging them to spread out. Crockett soon left them behind, however, and struck out in a wide half-circle, intending to swing back to a northwest course, or toward the Obion.

The kidnapers had done one of two things after the girl cried out; either they had retreated south, or had rushed ahead before the search began. Crockett believed they had fallen back in alarm, and therefore his haste in scouting south before striking out for the river. He made no effort to investigate possible hiding-places, but concentrated all his energies toward surprizing the quarry on the move. If the abductors sought cover, all well and good. He could search them out at leisure when the light strengthened.

He was positive the gang must halt and hide, or betray its presence, it being impossible for any body of men, conveying a prisoner, to pass through the tangled growth without advertising the fact. Every few rods he paused and listened. The only sounds were the far-off voices of his friends, occasionally calling out to announce their identity and escape a bullet meant for the outlaws.

"Making enough noise for a political barbycue," he grunted. "All we need is a band."

Most keenly did he now bemoan the dog. Old Tige in fifteen minutes could get more results than could fifty men in hours of effort. Speeding south until convinced he was beyond the point of any possible retreat he turned and commenced quartering his back track. The morning light now permitted him to stalk the thickets and deep crevices.

He moved with Indian cunning and found his task simplified because of his belief the kidnapers must be mounted. A covert sufficient to hold a few men and a woman would be impossible for men and horses. And he would take oath that so far as he had penetrated south no horses had traversed the woods toward the Obion.

"I 'low, Davie, you're about as big a fool as one of them Jackson hooters," he exclaimed in disgust as a new light broke upon his thoughts. "They'd planned to sneak close to the cabin in the dark, with Hogan guiding. If they got by they could laugh at us. They'd never bother to hide their trail, but would hustle on to the river and ride their horses aboard the boat and slip down-stream. Now what would any human being do that had the brains of a wood-louse on finding that particular plan had slipped up, plumb spoiled by the girl's screeching out? Why, turn back and ride like ——, till they'd reached the hiding-place they'd just left. There they'd hide up again for a bit. Between the cabin and Jackson is the place to look for them!"

Shifting to this theory he ran and walked until he was skirting the end of the rocky hill behind the cabin. The hill was the continuation of the ridge that helped form

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the ravine where Macon's Bull was buried. A short distance south of the cabin was a break through which horsemen could ride in the night. Crockett knew of no other trail suitable for mounted men.

He dashed into the opening fully expecting to find signs where the cavalcade had halted, alarmed by the girl's scream and the pistol-shots, and had turned in retreat. Gossamer canopies tented the grass in the open places, dew still beaded the ferns and other ground growth. But never a sign of a horse's hoof.

"Well, I'll be shot!" the hunter disgustedly exclaimed. "It's against all reason! They come close enough for the girl's yells to pour through the winders. It sounded almost as if she was inside the room, near enough for Brink to see them in the darkness and to shoot twice. And yet they didn't do it unless they come afoot. It ain't sense they'd travel afoot. It's possible Brink was mistook and didn't see them, but there wa'n't any mistake about the girl's calling out."

He pondered deeply for a minute, checking off his convictions on his fingers.

"I know they were close to the cabin. I know they was trying to get by to make the river. I know such cunning rascals would never try to tote a girl afoot through these woods. As horses don't have wings, and as there ain't no signs of horses here there's only one thing they could have done: sneak the girl by the cabin afoot while some one led the horses 'round us at a safe distance. Now, being sure you're right, see if you can go ahead, you dog-gone idiot!"

He had lost valuable time in taking the back trail and now sought to make up for some of it. Any one of the thickets he had ignored in racing to the rear of the cabin might have contained the girl and her captors. This was most logical once the horses were eliminated. Hope was still strong within him, however, for if afoot their pace must be that of the prisoner. If they carried her their pace would still be very slow.

Again, the hunter hoped that the sound of the pistol-shots would cause the man with the horses to make a wider detour than originally planned. After the manner of old Tige on a hot trail he sped through the growth, studying the possible hiding-places on either hand as he ran, but not decoyed from his purpose of cutting in between the outlaws and their horses.

JUST as his buoyant optimism was reaching its apex there came an interruption to his flight. A rifle spat at him, the bullet whining close to his head. Dropping as though shot, he wriggled toward the concealed marksman, believing he had stumbled upon the kidnapers' temporary hiding-place. What was his astonishment to behold the grief-stained face of Judge Curtes rising from behind some bushes. In his hand he held a rifle.

Knowing the weapon was empty Crockett leaped to his feet and harshly demanded:

"What you trying to pot me for, Judge? Thought I was going to be your political manager in this neck of the woods."

"Merciful heavens! Colonel Crockett! Is it possible I fired at you?" the judge weakly gasped.

"In my general direction. I don't see how it was possible for you to miss me," was the grim retort.

"God be praised that I missed! I never could have forgiven myself if my bullet had harmed you!"

"You oughter be back in the cabin instead of out here shooting at your friends," soothed Crockett.

"Hi! In there! Who's shooting?" bawled Skow's voice.

"Mistake!" called back Crockett. "Judge and me just comparing notes."

Skow and Melver came crashing into view, the former anxiously asking—

"Have any of you seen Macon?"

The judge stared at him blankly. Crockett's comely features took on an expression of deep concern.

"Macon! Young Jim Macon," he feebly repeated. "Why, dog-gone it! I can't remember seeing, or hearing, him from the time I woke up. Why, that's mighty strange!"

"It's —— strange!" agreed Skow, coming to a halt and puffing heavily. "What's more, neither Brink nor Melver has seen him. He must 'a' waked up first and quit the cabin on the jump while the rest of us was coming to our senses."

"Coming to our senses—your gran'-mother!" jeered Crockett. "When I wake up I do it all over. No one quit the cabin ahead of me after the girl screamed. Do

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you 'low Jim Macon would do any Injun work once he heard his girl yell out? He must have gone out with some crazy notion of finding her before she screamed. He must 'a' been outside when they tried to run her by the cabin. I was the first man up. I was on my feet when Brink fired.

"Good Lord! See here; it may have been Macon that Brink saw and fired at. Jim couldn't have been in the cabin when I got up. I've been way back of the cabin without finding a sign of horse or man. It's puzzled me to know how any one could come near enough for Brink to see and shoot at and not leave a trail. But if Brink saw Macon sneaking along the edge of the woods. Come on! We must look for Macon's body. Brink 'lowed he hit something."

Led by Crockett they struck a bee-line for the cabin and when half-way there came upon Brink stalking a small windfall. The noisy approach of the four men rendered further strategy on his part useless. He briskly snapped out:

"Now every one knows you're here you can help me to investigate this tangle. I heard something moving in there."

"We're in a hurry. There's only one way to find out things," Crockett said. "Take the other side, but don't mistake me for one of those skunks."

With that he plunged boldly among the prostrate tree-trunks and rapidly beat up the dense growth of bushes. With no pretense at prudence he worked back and forth, the others following along the edges of the area. Skow grew ashamed to hold back in the face of such an example, and called out:

"Come along, fellers. Let's not leave it for the colonel to do all the work."

With that he cast discretion aside and leaped in. Judge Curtes, oblivious to any personal danger, at once did likewise. Melver held back, while Brink bruskly announced:

"It isn't a question of physical courage. If they're not in there we're wasting time. If they are there it won't help the girl any for us to rush in and get shot."

"Brink's right," called out Crockett. "Get back where you belong, you two." Then to Brink, "We've got important business; that's why I'm in a hurry."

Finally all were satisfied the bandits were not concealed within the windfall, and Crockett tersely informed Brink of their uneasiness about young Macon.

Brink's cold eyes grew heavy with dismay as he listened, and without a word he turned and ran at a peculiar, yet swift, gait until he gained the clearing. Turning to the four men at his heels he pointed to the woods and said:

"I fired from the south window. I heard something moving just inside the first growth. I may have fired at a tree, it was so dark, but there is no doubt but what I heard something in there. I knew, or supposed I knew, that all of us were in the cabin. I believed it was one of the gang. So, I fired. God forgive me if I've harmed Mr. Macon. I shall never forgive myself!"

"Or it might have been Hicks coming home!" cried Skow.

Brink's jaw dropped.

"I'd forgotten all about Hicks," he faltered.

"It wasn't Hicks. I'm sure. Too much talk. Here goes," Crockett interrupted.

A man moving along the hem of the forest could easily be seen, provided the light sufficed, from the window in the south end of the cabin. And among the ferns and bushes they found him, lying on his side, his face covered with blood.

"Oh, God! I've killed him!" groaned Brink, throwing himself beside the body.

Crockett pushed him away and tore open the shirt and rested his ear over the heart.

"It's still beating; mighty weak, though," he informed. "Help me tote him to the cabin."

The young planter was quickly carried inside and placed on a bearskin. Crockett got water and washed his head and examined the wound. The bullet had struck near the top of the head, and after following its course with skilled finger the hunter rejoiced:

"Glanced along his tough skull. I 'low he'll live if we can get him to Jackson where a doctor can tend to him.

"It's twenty miles! It'll take the best part of two days for two men to tote him in," said Skow. "It'll take two strong men. Now, who's to go? The judge is out of the question."

"Still the judge ought to be back home," declared Crockett, and he thought of the bullet that so nearly ended his career. "We can work faster without him. He

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can go along and spell the other two at times."

"That still leaves two able-bodied men needed," Skow said. "As boss of this post I'm not supposed to quit it to go to Jackson so long as there is any one else to go. I reckon it's between Melver, Brink, and you, Colonel?"

"As I'm responsible for the young man's sad condition I'll let you and Skow decide it, Colonel," Brink said.

Crockett was dubious about Brink's ability to walk twenty miles over the rough country, carrying a powerfully built fellow like Macon every foot of the way. The New Englander was a powerful man, but that did not follow he could help carry Macon to Jackson and arrive in time for the doctor to do the invalid any good. The work needed a young man, one whose muscles had been especially trained for the grueling grind.

So far as expecting any help from Judge Curtes, the hunter instantly dismissed the idea. The judge and Brink had walked in from Jackson, but they had taken their time and carried no supplies. Since the loss of his daughter the judge had weakened greatly. In fact, the hunter feared the judge would need help himself before he got home. On the other hand, the prospect of abandoning the chase to Skow, Melver and Brink to carry on was intensely disagreeable. Yet young Macon must be rushed to the settlement with all possible haste.

Melver began suggesting the two men draw lots, and Crockett was motioning him to be silent and was about to say he would go, when his dilemma was solved by a call outside, and the trampling of horses. A glance through the window revealed Coombs and two other men, members of the Jackson posse.

"The good Lord sent them!" cried Crockett. "We must make a horse-litter and they can take him back in no time. Judge Curtes can ride in."

CROCKETT ran outside and hurriedly explained the accident. Coombs at once began cutting saplings for the litter. While he worked he informed:

"We struck signs of five horsemen an' follered 'em in this direction. Lost their trail a few miles back, but they had to come here to git through the ridge."

"We heard the girl yell as they was taking her by," Skow informed.

"They're striking for the Obion. They plan to take her down the river to the Mississippi. Judge Curtes, you must go back with the litter."

"Never!" choked the judge. "I love Jim Macon as I would a son; but I can't leave my girl out here in the hands of those damnable villains."

"Judge, you mustn't hold up the search," warned Brink. "You must return home. We'll do all that's humanly possible to find your daughter. And remember, if Potter Dick sends an offer to ransom her it must be acted upon at once, or he'll suspect double-dealing. In which case you'll never see your girl again. When he makes his offer he'll send it to Jackson, not to this place. You must be at home ready to negotiate at a moment's notice. Once you get word from Dick you can let us know through Coombs. He'll find some one here in the cabin. If he doesn't he can wait till some one comes."

"That's the ticket, as old Johnson said when he cast his vote," Crockett indorsed, his spirits rising at the prospect of sending the wounded man to town and of being rid of the judge, who was sure to be a nuisance in any quest for the girl. "We've wasted too much time already. I'm lighting out for my cabin on the Obion. Young Henry will know if any boat's dropped down-stream lately. If none has I shall work up-stream. Brink, Skow, and Melver, you three take the shortest cut to the river and keep an eye peeled for either of our four boatmen friends. Once you find their boat don't let it get away from you."

"Our boatmen friends and their boat!" they blankly repeated.

"Just that. They're using the boat to fool folks. They belong to Potter Dick's gang. They were to receive the girl here from the men who stole her. She's been passed on to them already and will soon be on their boat, bound for the Arkansas shore."

"But—but—how do you know all this?" Skow cried incredulously.

"Because Hogan tried to kill me on Wild Turkey Crick. He believes he did do for me. And he did kill Hicks. I seen the body."

This astounding information was received in dead silence. Then followed

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a wild volley of queries. Crockett shut them off, and briefly explained:

"I've held it back till the telling would do some good. Maybe it'll help now. There's a cave on the crick that the outlaws use. Hogan cracked me over the head while he was quitting it; me walking ahead and never dreaming he'd go to do it. He threw me into the crick and 'lowed I was finished. When I come to my senses I was out on the bank, hid by bushes, and he was trying to find my body with a pole. He did find my hat. After he fetched me the belt over the head he killed my dog, —— him! After he skun out I looked 'round and found the body of Hicks, knifed through the throat. Then I found the body of poor old Tige."

"—— it! Why have you held this back?" Brink fiercely roared.

"What good would it have done to have told you? You'd all gone running to the cave. Hogan didn't come back that night. I was there, waiting. His staying away showed he didn't expect the gang to come there. What happened here a few hours back shows I was right in keeping my trap shet. If I'd told you in the first place you'd all been at the cave and no one would 'a' been here to hear the poor little girl scream. That scream put us on the right track."

"Colonel Crockett, it's amazing you should conceal such important information," the judge weakly ruled.

"Like it, or lump it," Crockett growled. "You all know it now, and it wouldn't helped any if you'd known it before. Too much talking. I'm off. Remember the boatmen! Hogan's with them. If you see him shoot him for luck."

"We'll shoot him, never worry," Skow choked out.

Stuffing some cold meat in his pouch, Crockett waved aside all other queries and made off into the forest, following the spotted trees which would lead him to the Obion.

To cover the distance to the little cabin twenty miles away in the shortest possible time was the one thought in the hunter's mind. Skow, Brink, and Melver might strike the river too late to intercept the boat. As he ran along at full speed, or slowed down to clamber over fallen trees, two words danced through his mind until they seemed to be outlined in fire.

"Go ahead! Go ahead!" was the unvoiced refrain.

Then came a new thought, so involuntary, so entirely apart from the one idea racing through his mind, so at odds with his favorite motto, that it staggered him. Its intrusion was so vehement and abrupt that it suggested voices shouting from hidden tree-tops, rather than an explosion of brain cells. He halted and swung his gaze in a circle; then smiled sheepishly at his weakness in doing so.

"What put that fool notion into my head?" he grumbled. "What made the 'me' inside of me cry out for me to 'be careful'? I'm always careful. Be careful of what?"

With a shrug of his shoulders he sought to dismiss the idea of danger, and pressed forward again. The warning, uttered by self to self, however, would not down. He had received a suggestion he could not thrust from his mind. It was an irrelevant modification of his guiding rule—for who could "go ahead" if he paused to "be careful"?

Yet once he had received the thought he was compelled to scan the timber with suspicious gaze. Reason insisted the enemy were far ahead and only anxious to escape the country, that Hogan had told them he was dead, and that he had nothing to guard against until he came to the clinch.

"I 'low it's for them to be careful," he protested.

Finally he came to a dead stop and scowled savagely. Combat it as he would he could not overcome the sensation of danger. On one side of the blazed trail the trees had gone down like ten-pins before the hurricane. An ideal hiding-place for assassins; and yet he knew the menace was not to be found in that dead and decaying inferno of twisted and broken shapes. In turn he faced the north, and spied on his back trail, and stared ahead. His super woods-sense discovered nothing to substantiate the strange emotion. He scoffed at the fancy.

"I'll be cussed up-hill and down if it ain't funny," he ridiculed.

He had never encountered anything he was afraid of. He had fought Indians, he had fought with white men, and he had contended with nature in her roughest moods. Never before had he been obsessed in this fashion. It was more than caution;

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it almost verged on fear. Something inside his mind, something impersonal, was trying to warn him to be on his guard against an impalpable and inimical agency. Used to living in a purely material world, the mystery of it all worried him.

"Look out for what?" he wrathfully asked aloud.

The pithy crack of a rifle, and the whistle of lead, sent him ducking to cover. All his characteristic composure returned. Here was a situation he could understand. A shooting-match was to his liking, even if he served as the target. It was the hint of the supernatural that had bothered him. He remained motionless while he searched the tree-trunks and branches for the scar of a bullet in order to locate the assassin. Five minutes passed and he began begrudging the delay. Placing his fur hat on the muzzle of his gun he cautiously elevated it above the top of the bushes.

Spang! The hat hopped off the gun and the impact of lead against the barrel caused the hunter's hand to tingle.

"From the north, as I might 'a' know'd," he muttered, frowning at the mutilated head-gear. "Now that I know where he is I can go ahead."

The ordinary forest range was a hundred and fifty yards, but in this topsy-turvy wilderness the maximum would seldom reach a hundred. Squirming noiselessly through the bushes he selected a zone comparatively clear of underbrush for a depth of three hundred feet. He believed the assassin was concealed somewhere within that narrow area.

Had it not been for Tillie Curtes' plight this duel with the unseen would have appealed to him strongly. His strategy demanded an advance that would outflank the point of suspicion. Taking advantage of fallen trees and water gullies along the edge of the mistrusted section he at last decided he was abreast of the ambush, a patch of bushes behind a giant oak. Reclining on his left side he brought his rifle into position and smiled grimly as he glimpsed a patch of homespun showing through branches.

It was the extended arm of his would-be slayer, he told himself. Calculating the position of the body he drew a quick bead and fired. As an echo of his own shot came the *crack* of another rifle in the trail he had left; and his much abused hat was violently twitched half off his head. As he rolled aside he beheld the patch of homespun still among the bushes. Turning on his back he hastily reloaded, then took time to examine his hat. The shot had come from the trail, and approximately from the point where had stood when first fired upon.

Staring in that direction he smiled in grim admiration of the unseen's cunning. The piece of shirt had been left in the bushes as a decoy while the assassin stole to the trail to learn if the first shot had scored. This maneuver revealed brains. In event he had missed, the fellow had left behind a trap for the hunter to walk into. It was also complimentary to Crockett; for it assumed he would seek his enemy if unharmed. The assassin had crept to the trail while Crockett was crawling north; they had passed each other.

"He uses his head," conceded Crockett. "And it's only luck that Davie Crockett ain't among the angels now."

NOW came another disturbing thought. Primarily the game was to kill him; but there was a second objective. If not slain he was to be held from reaching the river until after something had happened. This could only mean, until after the boat had passed down-stream. This belief tossed him on the horns of indecision. He lusted to hunt down and exterminate the persistent marksman, with the rules of the game all to his liking. Yet he knew he must forego personal desires to save the girl.

He grew easier in mind, however, as he proceeded to reason.

"Whether he just wants to do for me for the fun of it, or because he wants to stop me from making the Obion, he'll be sure to chase me if I give ground. I can mix fun and business and enjoy the fighting while plugging on to the river."

With this comforting conclusion he worked farther north, shrewdly deducing that his trailer would wait a few minutes, expecting him to press the fighting, even as he had advanced on the shirt in the bush.

After withdrawing a safe distance the hunter took to his heels and raced toward the river, gradually swinging back to hit the spotted trees. As he entered this he was fired upon from ahead, the bullet striking a small bough and ricochetting.

"—— it!" he bellowed, quivering with

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rage that he should be outguessed a second time, and also because his life was spared by the interposition of the bough rather than by his own cunning.

But now his man was ahead he became pursuer, springing recklessly and determined to come to close quarters before the assassin would have time to reload. But run as he would he failed to find the rascal, and decided he had passed him. The hurt to his self-esteem rankled and urged him to tarry and have it out: the thought of the girl's plight held him to his duty.

For the rest of the day he pressed on undisturbed, but sullen and sulky as he brooded on his failure.

"If it wa'n't for that girl I'd show the varment what's what," he told himself in extenuation. "But a man can't run a race and chop trees at the same time." He could find no excuse, however, for having shot at an empty shirt. "Davie," he groaned, "it wa'n't because he was keen that you had done that. It was along of your being four-fifths fool. If a Injun had tried that game on granpap, granpap would 'a' set down and laughed at him."

This belittlement of self ceased when he was fired upon late in the afternoon. He was within two miles of his cabin and caught no glimpse of the man. He knew by the sound that the shot was at long range. Also, the country was now opening out into meadows and afforded less opportunity for an ambush. With a snarl of disgust he kept on, refusing to seek cover, or to look for the marksman.

He was in a very peevish mood, for one so sunny-hearted by nature, when he broke through the timber and beheld the cabin a scant hundred yards away. He glanced about for some sign of young Henry. The boy was not in sight. Then a man stepped from the cabin, and the hunter gaped in astonishment. It was Hogan. He had a gourd in one hand and a rifle in the other. He dipped the gourd into a bucket by the door and raised it to his lips and saw Crockett raising his rifle. He cried out something and fell backward through the door just as Crockett fired.

"Stand up to your lick-log!" yelled Crockett, dropping his rifle and racing toward the open door, waving his knife and pistol.

Without a thought of caution he plunged into the cabin, pistol raised and knife drawn back, and stared foolishly. The room was empty. Leaping to the window he detected a movement in the bushes and fired the pistol. Throwing it down and armed only with his knife he darted outside and struck into the timber. For an hour he ranged the woods before he would confess failure.

Returning to the cabin his depression was mitigated at finding Old Betsy standing in the corner. With a cry of joy he sprang to it, and hugged it to his breast, and examined it tenderly to make sure it was undamaged. It was intact except for some scratches on the stock.

"You got those when you tumbled down that dog-gone cliff," he condoled. "Never mind, old girl, we're together again. If only Tige was here we'd be the happy family."

On the floor was the gourd, pierced by his bullet. The hunter smiled with much satisfaction. If Hogan hadn't dropped as he did the lead would have gone through his head.

A cheery whistling up the river bank called Crockett to the door. Young Henry was returning with several ducks swung over his shoulder. On beholding Crockett he gave a hearty yell, and advanced on the run.

"You're back sooner'n I 'lowed for, Colonel. I heard a gun, but didn't dare hope it was you. Where's the jug?"

"Got mixed up in some business and forgot the jug," Crockett said. "Has any boat gone down-stream in the last twenty-four hours?"

"No boat since you went away. One went up-stream, bound for McLemone's Bluff. Heavy-faced feller they called Hogan come ashore and acted rather nosey. Nope; no boat's gone down-stream."

"Hurrah for Andy Jackson!" softly cried Crockett, his dark eyes lighting.

"Where's the dawg?"

Crockett's expression became one of great sorrow.

"A derned skunk killed him."

"Killed old Tige?" choked Henry. "Dod-burn his measly soul! I hope you give him his'n."

"I ain't yet, but I'm going to. He belongs to that boat up-stream. That boat mustn't get by this cabin without a reckoning between him and me."

"I should reckon not! Killed old Tige! The low-down ornery rip!"

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While Henry prepared some food Crockett watched the forest.

"What did Hogan talk about when he come here?" he asked.

"Oh, mostly about you. Wanted to know how many niggers you had. I told him you had to sell everything when the freshet washed away your mill. He fair got me riled by keeping up his questions. Didn't you have any niggers at all now? And didn't you ever have any here? As if you could have any here if you sold everything when the freshet washed you out!"

"That's like Hogan. He always wants to be sure when it comes to niggers," enigmatically explained Crockett.

CHAPTER VII

PIRATE ISLAND

THAT night a cloud-burst drowned the Obion country and flooded the river-bottoms for miles. Crockett attempted to stand watch with young Henry, but quickly discovered it was a waste of time. The storm cleared away with the morning, and he set out to scout up-stream in search of the boat, only to find he must keep so far back in the woods as to make his efforts useless. Returning to the cabin he stared disconsolate at the dismal wastes of submerged meadows, and surrendered:

"No use, Abe. Once I got into the woods I had to wade to my neck to get within sight of the channel. We'll stand watch here. The boat can't pass in the daytime without us seeing it."

"Probably passed in the night," young Henry suggested.

"I'd hate to think it," Crockett groaned.

"If it did the gang 'll try to strike across to the Arkansas side. Probably'll land on Pirut Island."

Crockett whistled, and exclaimed:

"Younker, I 'low you've hit it. Pirut Island is as likely a place as you'd find in the whole Mississippi River. More'n ten miles long with dead water between it and the Arkansas cane. No one ever lands there except some loony trying to find the treasure they say the gulf-piruts buried. Why in sin any pirut should shove way up here to hide his loot is a persimmon beyond me."

Several times the hunter was overcome by his impatience and essayed to scout up the river, and each time was compelled to turn back after wading to his shoulders in the cold waters. He and the boy could perceive that the river was falling, but it would be another twenty-four hours before he could get near enough to the bank to maintain a watch.

Once he decided to make a trip in his boat, a dugout, but a bit of reflection warned him the maneuver would profit him nothing. What with fighting against the current and dodging the snags now carpeting the swollen river he would be in an awkward position should he discover the flatboat. Offensive work would be out of the question, and he would afford an excellent target for riflemen. He already had witnessed an example of Rance's and Hogan's marksmanship.

"Won't do at all!" he ruefully concluded. "I might find the boat, but I'd have to run away. I 'low the only thing to do is to wait till the river drops. Then I'll hustle up-stream, and if the boat ain't this side of the harricane I'll go across to Pirut Island."

With the sullen resentment of a prisoner he prowled about the knoll, Old Betsy over his arm, and watched the turbid current. The sun sank red, painting the Obion a deep scarlet, and gilded each ugly snag and log. Crockett advanced to the edge of the overflowed meadow and planned for the night. young Henry should take the early evening and morning watches, while he stood guard during the black hours between, when his ears must serve for eyes. He was afraid the boat would run without lights until it struck into the Mississippi.

"Colonel! Colonel!" suddenly yelled young Henry from the cabin. "Come up here, quick!"

Crockett raced up the knoll. A narrow strip of the river showed over the top of a wooded point, invisible to one at the foot of the knoll. It was at this that young Henry was pointing. Crockett stared incredulously; then gave a whoop of joy. Down the golden pathway a flatboat was rapidly floating.

"It's got to be that boat! Only one went up while you was gone!" Henry cried.

"It's Hogan's boat, all right. They never went to McLemone's Bluff. Skin me for a coon if she ain't booming along something desperate. Listen, Abe; you stick to this cabin. If any men from the trading-post

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comes along tell them what's happened, and that I've took after the boat in a hope of coming to grips during the night. I'll wait till she gets below the bend so's I won't be spotted; them I'm off. Pack me up some meat, set out the jug—I forgot, there ain't no jug. I'll be bailing the dugout."

Keeping in the middle of the channel the boat rushed by the knoll and rounded the wooded bend below. Waiting until she had vanished from sight Crockett entered the dugout and began working through the forest debris eddying inshore. This was more tedious than dangerous, but he knew he must hug the left bank would he avoid discovery. The mighty Mississippi was only a few miles beyond.

Night came like a blanket as the flatboat danced out on the wild wastes tumbling down from the north. Crockett, at the imminent peril of capsizing, boldly pursued, no longer fearing detection. Lights sprang up ahead and simplified his task. The river was high, innumerable rivers having contributed their Autumnal floods and forest waste, and the hunter repeatedly escaped collision by the merest margin. As he cut into the full force of the current he glimpsed the lights of two up-river boats hunting for slack water well inshore on the Tennessee side, but of rafts and flatboats he saw none, and knew they were snugly tied up for the night.

This helped him much as it removed the danger of his mistaking the lights of some other craft for those on the flatboat. Once, when fighting through midstream, he turned his head and beheld a steamboat rushing upon him. It came out of the darkness and towered over him, and he gathered his legs for a leap and a deep dive to escape the paddle-wheels, and it was gone, lost in the black wall again with only its basket-torches showing like will-o'-the-wisps.

"That boat 'lows she owns the river. Well, she can have it for all of me," he grunted, as his precarious craft tossed and dipped.

It required some minutes for him to straighten out his course and when he looked for the flatboat the lights showed far down-stream. Digging in his paddle he worked mightily, ignoring the danger from snags and logs until the pull of the current told him he had gained easier water. A few minutes more and he was well astern of the boat; and took time to bail the dugout. The western shore was an inky wall, close at hand yet imperceptible. The lights below him swung across his course and disappeared. He breathed more freely and relaxed his taut nerves; for he knew his enemies had passed the head of the island and were now floating lazily in the dead water behind it. Working inshore he raised the lights, and this time he judged they were stationary.

"That younker of an Abe is a regular Injun to reckon things out," he softly whispered, holding the dugout straight for the lights.

At last he decided he was getting too close and veered out into the river until the lights vanished; thus locating the head of the island he made for it and soon found himself compelled to duck beneath overhanging boughs. His paddle touched bottom and he slid overboard and waded to a heavily timbered bank. Drawing up the dugout until there was no danger of its floating free, or of being observed from the water, he took his rifle and returned to the thing he most excelled in—woodcraft.

He explored a few rods of the timber and felt the hard, narrow surface of a trail beneath his feet. After following this a bit he knew it ran north and south, probably traversing the island from tip to tip. He advanced cautiously for twenty minutes and was brought to a halt by the sound of voices. Then a light bobbed into view, and the voices grew louder, and he took shelter behind a tree; as he did so the light disappeared.

His first thought was that the men had discovered his presence and had extinguished the light. Before he could consider this suspicion he heard the voices off one side; and the simplicity of it all caused him to smile. They had turned at right-angles, taking a trail that led down to the flatboat.

Hastening on he was soon rewarded by a glimpse of the light, and easily found the path.

"Now, let's see, Davie," he murmured. "They quit the boat and followed the main trail to some fixed camp. Then they go back for something, maybe after supplies. I' 'low you'd better take them as they come along. T'other end of the trail can wait. Sweep clean as you go, as old man Johnson said when he fell over the cliff and clawed loose all the vines."

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THE light by the water ducked from sight, but the low murmur of voices continued, and he advanced until he stood within a few feet of the flatboat. He was startled to hear some one moving along the shore close by him and drew his knife and waited. Then a man clambered aboard and dropped down through a hatch. As the hatch was lifted a shaft of light streamed up.

Stealing beyond the boat Crockett glimpsed an evil face through the small hole, or port, through which river-men can dip up water without bothering to go on deck.

"That chap ain't one of the four boatmen," he murmured. "And I'll be blessed if they've had a chance to pick up Hogan. He couldn't 'a' got up-stream before the storm busted. The cuss I see must be one of the men who sneaked the girl by Skow's cabin."

He listened sharply and caught three voices. He maneuvered the port again and made out a second face, bloated and villainous. He had never seen the man before.

"That makes two strangers out of the three aboard. One of Hogan's men may be the third, but t'others must be up the trail."

Laying aside his rifle he gently drew himself aboard the boat. The hatch was open a few inches and through the crack issued the reek of much tobacco smoke and a jumble of talk.

Crawling to the side, with the silence of a snake and the ease of an acrobat, he swung out and peeped through the port-hole and beheld the third man. He was a stranger. Returning to the hatch he flattened himself on the deck to listen.

Now he could hear plainly, and at once deduced the three men were continuing some argument.

"I tell ye if I'd been the chief there wouldn't 'a' been all this lallygaggin' 'round. I'd ended it with just a shove of a knife," angrily remarked one.

"Ye have a hankerin' for blood, Pete," laughed another.

"It's more'n half the game, Belt. The chief oughter know that out in this country there ain't no need for fussin' 'round an' picking yer time. Just wade in an' rip 'em open, is my motter."

"Like we done for Macon's nigger, eh? Well, I reckon ye've got the right of it, Pete," agreed the one called Belt.

The third man now spoke up, and ominously reminded:

"Pete, if Belt, or me, blabbed what ye've been sayin' about the chief, makin' fun of his ways an' the like, I reckon the turtles an' catfish would be feedin' off from yer carcasses in a mighty pert fashion. Now I'm tellin' ye."

There was a dead silence for nearly a minute; then the man Pete appeared to be frightened and begged:

"Wells, old partner, ye wouldn't peep on a mate? Tell me, Wells, ye wouldn't blow any keerless words I might have spoke. We know ye stand high with the chief; but that wouldn't turn ye ag'in a mate."

"I 'low I do stand high with the chief," was the smug reply. "I ain't out for yer scalp, Pete. If I was I could 'a' had it any time these last six months, by just dropping a few words in the chief's ear. But ye want to be more keerful in yer talk. Trouble with ye is that ye snoop down a few drinks an' then let yer tongue wag. When the chief's 'round I notice there ain't any one in the gang that'll drop his tail 'tween his legs an' crawl so quick as ye will. Belt here has a touch of the same trouble, too."

Another pause, tragic in potentials Crockett believed. Then Belt spoke up in an odd voice and asked:

"See here, Wells, we all have our faults, and it's as ye say that the chief would make catfish-bait of any of us that talked loose. But among ourselves, an' meaning no harm an' knowin' we're among pards, there can't be any danger of a feller splittin' our keerless talk to the chief, is there?"

"While I'm one of ye an' work as a common hand, yet I stand on a pretty smart footin' with the chief. He expects considerable of me. When it comes to lettin' keerlessness sp'ile the business of this gang I wouldn't move a hand to save my own brother."

Crockett smiled grimly.

"The poor fool is inviting a knife!" he told himself.

"Of course ye're right, Wells," meekly agreed Pete. "But if we do better an' cut out our keerlessness ye'll keep shet, won't ye?"

"I won't yip on what's been said in the past if no more ain't said in the futur'," gravely assured Wells.

This time the silence was prolonged and

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Wells was the first to break it, peevishly crying out—

"What do ye two mean by lookin' at each other that way?"

"—— yer hide, it means we're on to yer game," Pete huskily informed. "We know that even now ye're plannin' to run an' tell things. I can see it in yer eyes, ye son of a skunk! Ye've allers 'lowed to git me in bad with the chief. But ye're a —— fool to say as much when ye're alone with me'n' Belt in a place like this."

"The chief looked kinder queer at us, Pete," Belt added with a snarl. "I've been reckonin' for some time that he'd heard talk about us."

"Good Lawd, fellers!" exclaimed Wells with a poor attempt at a laugh. "Ye beat the nation for makin' believe. Why, boys, ye know there ain't a feller what's more true-blue to his mates then I be. Don't look at me like that, Pete! Ye've been hittin' the jug. Tomorrer mornin' ye'll be sorry. Jest put the idee out of yer head till mornin'. Then if ye don't say ye're sorry for what ye've 'lowed in this here cabing tonight I'll hand over a new gold-piece what I've got hid on this boat! Nothin' could be fair'n that, I 'low."

"Belt, hear the skunk! So, ye've read it in my eyes, eh? Belt, see him sit there an' sweat blood! The —— spy! Belt, do ye know what he's figgerin' on this minute? To blab to the chief the minute he gits to him, an' git us 'dismissed.' "

"Honest to Gawd! No, no, fellers! Listen. Why, boys, think of the games an' games we three have been in! Think of the loot we've shared together! Why, when I found them two women livin' alone an' knew they had money, didn't I come to ye boys an' let ye in on it?"

"Ye cur! Ye was skeered to face two women," gritted Belt.

"Oh, see here, boys. Please listen to me. Pete, jest make Belt understand it can't do no hurt to listen to me. Now, boys, hear this. I'm goin' to prove I'm a real friend. Wait! For Gawd's sake wait one little minute! I've saved my gold, I tell ye. Wait! It's in this boat now. I never cared for the jug an' keerds as ye two do. I never liked fun as—well, as I oughter. Ye two are my best friends. Don't I know that? Think I'm goin' to be lousy-mean with my share of the yaller when old pards is down to empty pockets? Now, let's all take a drink an' then take a few dollars from my little pile and be as fit as a fiddle when we strike the River Palace an' the River Annex at Natchez-under-the-hill. Now, I swear, boys, that's bein' neighborly, ain't it?"

"Ye rotten cur! I'll cut yer throat!" hissed Pete. "Ye've been plannin' to do for us. Belt, it was this whelp that turned the chief ag'in Lane. I know it! Look at his eyes! He says as much with them eyes. He's talked 'bout feedin' catfish! He can show the way!"

"Don't! Don't! Don't!" shrieked the terrified man, and Crockett heard an ominous scuffling of heavy boots. And the wretch screamed, "My gold's here—in this cabing. Wait! I'll git it!"

"Hold on, Pete!" cried Belt. "Put up yer stabber till we see if he's yarnin' or tellin' the truth."

"It's the truth," gasped Wells. "It's back of the board behind ye. I fitted the place when we was hung up at Memphis last time. Jest pull on the head of that nail an' the board'll come out."

"—— if it don't!" exclaimed Pete. "Hi! It's empty! Catch him, Belt!"

There was a crash from overturned stools and the hatch flew open and a man leaped on deck, squeaking with fear. At his heels came his two mates, cursing horribly.

"I've got him!" panted the foremost of the pursuers; and Crockett lowered himself over the side of the boat.

"Then shet off his blattin' afore the chief hears it!"

"In a second. Now I've got him." . . . "Oh!"

The exclamation was a scream of a man who knows death has him. And as Pete lunged forward through the darkness there came a splash in the muck and Wells' voice was mocking—

"Thought he had me, didn't he?"

With a howl of rage Pete fired two pistols toward the voice, but the sound of fleeing feet continued, growing more indistinct as the fugitive withdrew into the forest.

PETE made no effort to follow. He dropped his dead mate within the light feeding through the hatch and stared down into the distorted features, and mumbled:

"Served ye right for bein' a bungler. Now the chief will 'dismiss' me if he gits

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me. He's got gold hid on this island if I only knowed where to put my paws on it. No, no. It's too risky. He's the devil. He'd know I was hid up here an' he'd never go 'way till he'd found me. I've got nearly an hour to work the boat off an' pole 'round th' head of th' island."

Before attempting to escape, however, he rifled the pockets of the dead man and pushed the body overboard. It splashed beside Crockett, who drew himself on deck, remarking—

"Pretty way to treat an old friend, Pete."

With a howl of terror Pete started to run and stepped one foot through the open hatch. As he fell Crockett caught him by the arms and pulled him back.

"Where's the girl?" he demanded, shaking the trembling figure.

The light from the cabin illuminated the hunter's face; and Pete suddenly realized it was no ghost that held him, but a strange man.

"She's at the camp up the trail," he groaned, twisting his legs to make sure they were uninjured.

"Get along and show me the way," ordered Crockett, jerking him upright.

The next moment he was fighting for his life as the outlaw clinched and endeavored to trip him.

"You poor varment!" Crockett growled, breaking the hold and sending Pete spinning the length of the boat.

Then he leaped after him to prevent his escape.

But Pete believed it was do or die, that he must be left in possession of the flatboat if he were to escape; and, incidentally, he was a fighting man. So he met the hunter's rush half-way, a long knife in his hand. By this time Crockett had pulled a knife and each managed to secure the other's knife-hand. For a fraction of a minute they stood with arms extended.

"Ye come in jest handy," panted Pete. "I'll tell the chief that other scum run when ye come, that ye killed my pard, an' that I done for ye. Chief likes bold men. He won't mind Wells' yarns when he sees ye with yer throat cut."

Crockett made no move while the other talked, hoping he would drop some clue.

"Got the girl for ransom, eh? Well, the price is waiting."

Pete tugged to test the other's grip and snarled:

"He'll git the price—an' keep the girl. That's why ye're goin' under." And he thrust a foot behind Crockett's heel and jumped against him.

The hunter dropped on his back and brought up his knees, hurling the outlaw over his head, and tearing his weapon free although retaining his grip on his adversary's knife-hand. With a squawk of fear Pete tried to drag himself clear of the terrible, recumbent figure. As inexorable as fate, the hunter pulled him alongside, easily evading the frantic gropings for his right hand. Then they rolled across the deck and plumped down into the water. A few moments later Crockett climbed on board and wrung the water from his long hair, and mused:

"Said he had an hour. Time enough to look below.

"Dropping through the hatchway he quickly examined the small cabin. Rough clothing and a few weapons hung along the sides. Some food cluttered a board in the bow. Under this was a jug. The hunter sniffed it and then ventured to drink.

"That oughter dry me out," he muttered.

As he was replacing the jug he noticed a piece of paper on the floor. He might have ignored it if not for the fact he instantly recognized the writing. He could have picked it from thousands of samples, just as he could identify any topographical feature in any region he had ever visited. It was identical with the writing he had found in the cave. He brought it close to the candle and whistled softly as he spelled out:

Macon didn't go. Coming your way.

"Macon coming—coming after the 'chief.' That boy has guts. I'll be shot if he didn't come to his senses before they could tote him to Jackson. Then he must 'a' lit out for the Obion. This writing was delivered before the boat started down-stream. But who wrote it? Hogan?"

Thrusting it into his pocket he continued his investigation, and found a small cubby-hole behind the cabin. There he picked up a handkerchief, pressed into a ball and damp from drying many tears. Spreading out the piece of linen he was not surprized to find "M. C." worked in one corner. He placed it in his pocket with the message.

Ascending to the deck he rapidly examined the rest of the boat and discovered the craft was in ballast.

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"Dog-gone it!" he cried. "They didn't even go to the bother of taking a load up the Obion. Now I'd 'lowed they'd done that much, if only for a bluff. But I'll swear there hasn't been a load in this boat for months."

Quitting the boat he soon recovered his rifle.

"Two of the gang done for. That leaves three or four more to deal with. And the girl is up the trail waiting for me to come and get her."

His first thought was to lay in wait until the outlaw called Wells should return with the "chief" to wreak vengeance on Pete. His second thought was so promising and simple that he wondered it had not been his first. Instead of biding the coming of two or more outlaws he would hasten to the camp, hiding if they came along, and thus have a clear road to the girl.

"My name ain't D. Crockett if I can't get the best of the two or three men left to guard her," he declared. "And once I get my paws on her I'll be shot if I don't snake her off this island."

The nearer he was to the camp before passing the men bound for the flatboat the more time he would have in effecting the girl's release. This realization quickened his heels once he gained the main trail. From up the river came the hoarse whistle of a boat. He wondered what the people aboard of her would think could they visualize the tragedy being enacted on Pirate Island. Theirs were errands of business and pleasure down-river. Their comfort and safety were assured. Yet they might be passing almost within sound of voices pleading for mercy, or blaspheming with the lust to do murder.

"Dern queer world," mused Crockett. "You never know what's happening in the next clearing. A bear picks berries and gobbles them down while his neighbor is being shot out of a tree."

His meditations came to an abrupt end as he walked into a thicket of briars. Gingerly retreating, his feet found the trail and informed him that it forked into two branches. He was uncertain which to take, but after lightly brushing his finger-tips over the surface of each path he found one roughened up by boot-prints. He followed this for some distance, and was startled to hear angry voices, the scream of a woman, and the sharp crack of firearms close ahead.

The woman's outcry frightened him. The failure of Wells and his leader to return to the boat was ominous. The hunter could think of no explanation for the outbreak unless it be that the gang had mutinied. If that were the case and the leader be slain the girl's predicament was most terrible. Better that she be a prisoner of Potter Dick, awaiting ransom, than the common booty of his men.

With no time for making a careful reconnaissance Crockett broke from the woods and found himself in a stump-filled clearing. Ahead was a substantial log cabin with lights showing through several windows. He knew this must be one of the gang's permanent camps. Without pausing to practice finesse he cocked his rifle and charged on the cabin.

The door was open and across the threshold was a dead man. Inside some one was groaning in a death-agony. Crockett leaped over the corpse and stood staring down at the dying. That this man still lived was a miracle, as his breast appeared to be riddled with balls. He was seated on the rough floor, leaning against the wall. His wounds bubbled with escaping air as he pumped for breath; and the pallor of death was on his sweaty face.

"Who are you? What are you?" Crockett demanded, after thrusting his head inside the door of an adjoining room to make sure no assassin lurked there.

"Bill Wells," gasped the dying man, his eyes flickering with intelligence. "Potter Dick done for me. Shot me down in cold blood after all the dirty work I done for him. Done for him, too."

And he rolled his eyes toward the corpse in the door.

"Where is he?" whispered Crockett.

The man's head fell on his chest; he was drifting out on the dark bosom of a far mightier river than the Mississippi.

"Where is he? I've come to kill him," Crockett sharply cried.

These words pulled Wells back.

"Kill him—for me," he gurgled. "Girl to Natchez. Steamer—pick him up—Palace." Then with a final effort, "Steamer—pick him up wood-yard."

"Where's the yard?" frantically asked Crockett.

Wells tried to say something. Crockett dropped beside him.

"End of trail," faintly came the words.

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Leaping to his feet, Crockett hurled back as a measure of thanks:

"Pete's dead. I did for him."

The dying man's gaze revived for a second, and he smiled in a ghastly fashion as his head dropped forward.

"Four men counted out since I struck this death-hole," Crockett mumbled.

RUNNING 'round the cabin, he soon found the trail. As he entered it a steamer whistled inshore; and the dying outlaw had said the girl was to be taken to Natchez, that a steamer was to pick her and the chief up at a wood-yard. The bandit leader and his victim must be just ahead, and the hunter ran recklessly through the darkness, depending entirely upon his feet to seek out the path.

There was no question as to the steamboat being about to make a landing. What puzzled the hunter tremendously, however, was to understand the outlaw's temerity in taking the girl aboard the boat. She had only to cry out, to ask protection of the first man she saw after crossing the gangplank, to be released from captivity. And still Potter Dick was deliberately taking her from a retreat he had every reason to believe was proof against discovery to mingle with free men and women on a Natchez and New Orleans bound boat.

"There'll be three passengers to go aboard instead of two," panted Crockett as he bounded along the narrow path.

The path took a sudden turn and Crockett failed to make it and crashed into a stump and sprawled on his back, the breath knocked from his lungs.

Coughing and choking for air, he finally managed to stagger to his hands and knees, to find his rifle and work himself to his feet. A hundred feet away a basket-torch smoked and flared and lighted a tumbled-down landing. Fifty feet from the landing a lordly passenger-boat was beating the river to foam as she made ready to get under way. And a man and a girl were lighting from the steamer's tender.

Crockett, using his long rifle to support his aching body, stared in amazement. She was small of figure, and as she passed under the torch on the freight deck he saw her hair was light, or yellow. But what astounded him was to see her walking with her hands clasped over the man's shoulder, her face tilted up, as though listening eagerly to his words. The hunter even believed he could read an expression of radiant joy on her up-turned face.

Had the steamer come into the landing, instead of sending the boat, Crockett could have made it in spite of his accident. He tried to cry out for the boat to wait, but his voice would not rise above a husky whisper. He staggered through the stumps to gain the landing, saw he would be too late; and in his desperation discharged his rifle to attract attention. The man threw his arm about the girl and hurried her away. As the two disappeared the deck-hands and some of the passengers fired a volley of pistol-shots among the stumps.

Crockett dropped behind cover, groaning:

"Dod rot their ignorant hides! Potted away at me as if I was an outlaw. And if that was Potter Dick why the devil is the girl glad and happy to be with him? Why did he take her from this place where he had everything his own way? Why did he kill two of his men? Was it because he feared the boat was going to stop to wood-up, and that some one would find the cabin? That don't make sense; the cabin's well hid."

Before canvassing this particular point further he ran to the dilapidated landing and by the light of the expiring torch noted the absence of any wood-piles. He also discovered the landing had not been used for some time and was unsafe to walk upon.

"It gets worse and worse," he mumbled. "No boat woods up here nowadays. Potter Dick called her in by signaling. The Jackson gang passed the girl on to Hogan's crowd. Hogan turned her over to this crowd. Proof of this is that none of Hogan's men are on the island. Did Potter wipe them out to break the trail? Now I wonder if that is it. Yet he must have know'd the man Pete hadn't been killed. Davie Crockett, you're going to be a great traveler. You're going all the way to Natchez on the chance that dying rascal know'd what he was talking about. But it's dog-gone queer the way that girl acted!"

CHAPTER VIII

DAVIE ADDS TO HIS SCORE

THREE hundred feet above the river the upper town of Natchez gazed tranquilly on the cultivated fields of Concordia and an endless, monotonous level of cypress

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swamps on the opposite shore. To the east the vista was even more pleasing; a rich and a beautiful country, dotted with open woods and pretentious country estates. The streets of the upper town were wide and quiet and sedate, and breathed an atmosphere of restfulness and affluence. Yet for all her gracious charms and romantic surroundings the upper town could never forget her blood kin, Natchez-under-the-hill, nor cease worrying.

Under the bluff the streets followed the river front and were almost impassable with their barricades of cotton. Through the lower town flowed the current of the back-country's cotton, and cotton was king. Between New Madrid and New Orleans, Natchez-under-the-hill was the great rendezvous for river-men. In the big bayou at New Madrid bargains were made to "lash" boats for mutual safety and convenience during the down-trip, with Natchez the mecca.

Thus to Natchez came flotillas of "Kentucky flats," or "broadhorns," oblong arks sometimes measuring a hundred feet and carrying four hundred barrels, or, perhaps, many head of cattle. In these much of the varied products of the upper country were shipped down the river. From New Madrid also came the slender and more elegantly formed keel-boat with its fifteen or twenty ton cargo, the crews carefree and happy and trying to forget they must "bushwhack" up the river.

From the upper country also came scow-boats and Allegheny skiffs—"sleds," in the argot of the river. Even primitive periagua, hollowed from mighty trees, were to be seen in the conglomeration of river craft tied up at the town under the hill. Hunters and Indians, hardy adventurers, silently arrived and boisterously departed in their frail canoes, or dugouts, on their way to New Orleans, coming fresh from the far Northern forests.

Such a hodge-podge of water craft is difficult to classify, being of all patterns and sizes, with their ladings covering a wide range. Some were loaded with planks of pine from New York, some with "Yankee notions" from the Ohio country; others from old Kentucky carried whisky and bagging and bale rope. Illinois and Missouri contributed cattle, horses and hogs, peltry and lead, for the New Orleans market. Also could be found corn in bulk and on the ear, apples and potatoes in barrels, huge quantities of dried fruit, cargoes consisting only of cider, boats filled with furniture, or tools, or domestic and agricultural implements; all that represented the industry and ingenuity, the speculation and suffering, the manufacture and agriculture, of the upper country and the little-explored West.

The types of men were as varied as the trails they had traversed, and their boats had covered acres as they descended on the town under the hill. They were accompanied by dram-boats and retail stores, Spanish and French trading-boats—"chicken thieves" the river-men called the last. Always coming, always going, the crews hurried ashore "to raise the wind" and fortify their thirst against the last leg of the trip. Boisterous greetings of old friends, shouts of defiance and mortal combat between old foes, ardent love-making to the harpy-women seeking their prey, convivial drinking with gamblers hunting victims, the scraping of a violin and the mellow call of a bugle, often punctuated by pistol-shots, formed the segments of life which made Natchez-under-the-hill a paradise for river-men and the despair of moralists.

Young Humphrey, only son of a wealthy planter in Washington, a fair village five miles in the interior, greeted the morning with upraised glass in the Welcome Hand saloon, and inwardly admired himself for lasting through a wild night of dissipation. He was vastly proud, too, that he and his mates had been tutored by Cherokee, a fascinating model of wickedness. That he alone should survive to join with Cherokee in a morning dram was something to remember. Incidentally he had paid for the dram and an ocean of others, for during the night Cherokee had relieved him of some four hundred dollars at cards. The only son considered the price cheap, however; it wasn't every young man that Cherokee "took to."

There was a mystery about Cherokee which attracted young men as the candle draws moths, which made them feel they were favored and honored even when he bilked them. His superb physical bearing, his long black hair and thin, narrow face, provoked comment. His well-modulated voice and careful language in a time and place where coarseness of speech prevailed, lulled one's sensibilities. Young Humphrey believed the rumored whisper that the

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river-front knew nothing of the real man, that gambling was merely a mask to cover a more desperate business. This was as the young man wished. It thrilled him to realize he was on hobnobbing terms with one whose name was handled carefully from Memphis to New Orleans.

So he gazed over his glass admiringly as Cherokee nodded a toast and tossed off his liquor. The clean-shaven face, pallid from night prowling and avoidance of the sun, accented the luster of his dark hair and the black depths of his narrow eyes. The youth sensed only romance in Cherokee. He was bad, but in a sublime way. Had any told him the man was a fearful product of cross-breeding and environment, that the polished charm of his bearing simply covered the mercilessness of a panther, that once stripped of his thin veneer he would stand forth a ravenous monster, the only son would have persisted in believing the gambler possessed the saving grace of romantic eccentricities.

Prosperous business-men and rich planters were strung along the bar, as were also rough river-men, and desperadoes of various shadings of courage and prowess. And young Humphrey was pleased to note none infringed on the end of the bar, facing the entrance, that Cherokee had pre-empted on entering. As they lowered their glasses young Humphrey insisted they have one more, and the hovering bartender obsequiously pushed forward the decanter.

With a graceful gesture the gambler bid the youth to charge his glass. Enjoying the glances he knew were being shot at him young Humphrey leisurely poured out his drink. Cherokee was carefully measuring out a scant two-fingers when a newly arrived river-man, wearing no covering on his mat of dishevelled hair, truculently came down the bar, hoarsely bawling:

"Make way for the human blizzard what freezes an' kills everything he looks at! Make room for the scourge of the Ohio, what's planted men on every crick an' river what flows into the old Mississip'!"

He was a big fellow and half mad from drink. In a belt of rope was thrust a long knife and pistol. The snugly packed line sullenly began to give room to accommodate the new-comer, but the blood-shot eyes had noted the extravagance of space being enjoyed by Cherokee and his admirer, and he swung to the end of the bar, and, with ferocious scowl at the expressionless visage of the gambler, spread his elbows, shoving young Humphrey against his patron.

The intrusion caused Cherokee to spill a few drops of liquor. Pulling an immaculate handkerchief from his sleeve he wiped his fingers.

"Come here, ye flat-footed pup!" the human blizzard thundered at the nearest bartender. "An' come now 'fore something draps!"

Stepping back Cherokee gently pushed young Humphrey next to the wall and lifted a slim hand and motioned the bartender to keep away.

"The gentleman has made a mistake," he quietly informed. "He has wandered into the wrong drinking-place. He intended to visit some bar down the street."

The human blizzard glared at the graceful figure in amazement. Finally he exploded—

"Wal, —— yer hide!"

Cherokee's left hand shot through the shaggy beard and clutched the red throat while his left flipped the pistol from the rope belt to the floor, but retained the knife and pricked the point through the coarse shirt until the river-man winced.

"I said you had made a mistake, you dog!" whispered Cherokee, thrusting his pale face close to the bulging eyes of the intruder. "Do you know where you want to go now?"

Gasping for breath the human blizzard managed to nod his head.

"Then go at once," murmured Cherokee, hurling him back.

Completely cowed, the blizzard ran from the room amid the hoots and yells of the drinkers. Cherokee threw the knife at the wall behind the bar, where it stuck, deeply embedded, a few inches below the ceiling. Then wiping his hands he softly remarked:

"You'd better go to bed, Humphrey. You show signs of wear."

"I can't carry off this life as you can," lamented the young man. "Shall I look you up at the River Palace later?"

"No, sir! You are to never look me up at the Palace," hissed Cherokee. "Did I ever ask you there, or take you there? No. That's enough for you to know I don't want you there. Keep clear of the Palace."

"No harm meant, Cherokee," meekly assured Humphrey. "What about tonight. I've got to get back home tomorrow."

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"I shall be busy tonight," the gambler discouraged. Then with a light laugh, "You must go home tomorrow. A woman, I suppose."

Young Humphrey flushed and wished he had the nerve to spin a lie glibly.

"No, it's not a woman," he shortly replied.

"Good God! You're not working, are you?"

"My father can count dollars with any planter within a hundred miles," retorted Humphrey, his gorge rising.

"I apologize, my dear boy. It was the way you put it—must go home, you know. I fail to understand. I could understand an affair with a woman; or if you had a job, as the cursed Northerners say. Otherwise, being your own boss——"

"I told my father I would be back tomorrow," Humphrey coldly retorted. "And I am a man of my word."

Cherokee smiled blandly and clapped him on the shoulder and approved:

"Good for you. A man should always consider his word as sacred. Hello, here's another backwoods lout I must teach manners. A Nimrod, fresh from the wild and noble forests. Acts like he was lost."

Leaning his left elbow on the bar the gambler deferred his departure to watch the erect, alert figure of Crockett just inside the door.

THE bear-hunter was not lost, nor was he diffident. His gregarious nature warmed to the spectacle of the laughing and drinking line of men along the bar. Putting off in his dugout he had been fortunate enough to catch a steamboat a few hours behind the one carrying Tillie Curtes and the strange man. All the way down the river he had brooded over his errand and worried as to its outcome. Once he had landed under the hill he had relaxed and permitted his pulses to dance as he drank in the life and color of the waterfront.

The printed word had brought little to him, but travel was his great educator. He had admired the sea of boats. He had keenly enjoyed the sweet harmony of dusky roustabouts, singing at their work, and had critically approved of a mate's magnificent profanity. The Welcome Hand was the climax of his walk through the lower town. Only now, that he was inside the barroom he suddenly remembered he had no money, and that he could not whistle up one of his dogs and "rustle" for coon-skins and exchange two for a quart. It was this realization and its attending disappointment that allowed Cherokee to misread his facial expression.

"Wants a drink but is too scared to mix up with people," the gambler jeered. "Comes of sticking at home too close, my boy. Makes a man so bashful he only feels at ease when out of sight of human beings."

"He's right smart well set-up. Reckon he's able to look out for himself," Humphrey decided.

Crockett swung down the room, purposing to look about before leaving. As he reached the end of the bar and wheeled, Cherokee remarked—

"The mighty Nimrod has lost the trail."

Instantly Crockett faced him and directed a level glance at the gambler, and gently inquired—

"Did you speak to me?"

Cherokee caressed the spotless ruffles filling the bosom of his shirt and took his time in admiring the handsome rings he wore on his left hand. Then he condescended to inform:

"I spoke of you, not to you. I did not intend to interrupt your forest-running. You may go now."

Humphrey's generous nature disapproved of the studied insolence of his patron's words, and yet he could not resist a half-hearted smile. Other men who had watched the little scene laughed openly.

Crockett classified him unerringly as being cold-blooded and merciless. He detested the type. Besides, he was angry at himself for having entered the place while not possessing the price. Instead of moving on, as directed, he ran his gaze up and down Cherokee's exquisite figure with much deliberation. Then turning to Humphrey, and speaking in a voice that carried as clear as a bell, he gravely confided:

"I've got him placed now. Yes, siree! I know the breed."

Cherokee's narrow eyes became mere slits, and his thin nose seemed to grow thinner. To the thoroughly alarmed youth Crockett continued explaining:

"He's in the same class with old man Johnson's foolish son, who'd go 'round trying to attract attention by beating on an empty barrel. In a place where he wa'n't knowed

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he'd get a crowd 'round him in no time. Folks would come on the run, thinking he had something to sell, or was going to make an electioneering speech. And there he'd stand, whanging away on the empty barrel with the folks getting impatient for him to begin to operate.

"Of course, the poor cuss hadn't a word to say, and the crowd was always disappointed. Sometimes the folks would take it good-natured and laugh and hoot and let him go. Other times they'd get mad and 'low he was trying to play tricks with them, and they'd maul him 'round quite considerable. But you couldn't cure him; he was plumb foolish, empty-headed like his bar'el."

Then turning on the astounded gambler he declared:

"And I can tell by the washed-out color of your face that you ain't got a word to say, no more than old Johnson's foolish boy had. Am I right?"

As he put the query he allowed Old Betsy to drop across the hollow of his left arm with the muzzle in line with Cherokee's pale face.

Young Humphrey, not keenly perceptive after the night's dissipation, beheld a picturesque backwoodsman, dressed in deer-skin and wearing a fur hat with the tail rakishly hanging over one shoulder, presuming through ignorance to address a dangerous question to the most feared, if not most highly respected, man in the lower town.

But the gambler, panther sheathed in soft dress, caught the warning in the carelessly held rifle, and with a short laugh promptly admitted:

"You're right, stranger. I have nothing more to say."

And he turned to the bar as if to dismiss the incident as being unworthy of further notice.

Crockett grinned broadly and winked at young Humphrey, and would have departed had not the youth detained him, saying:

"Hold on, Nimrod. Don't mind if I call you Nimrod, as I don't know your name. But speaking of empty barrels, I reckon there's a full barrel behind the bar, and Cherokee here and I would like to have you help us lower it."

"Younker, I 'low you're all right," Crockett affably answered. "You mean well, I know. A boy can't go far wrong if a older head don't lead him on. Nothing worse'n high spirits and horse-play. Call me anything you want to, for you've got a clean tongue. But I'm rather fussy who I drink with, and you'll be mighty wise if you'll be a little more particular."

To permit of no mistake in his meaning he nodded toward Cherokee.

There was complete silence in the room, and the bartender maintained a rigid pose with mixing-glass half raised as he stared worriedly at the end of the bar. With a snarl the gambler pivoted, his right hand darting to his waistcoat, his face ferocious with anger. Crockett persevered—

"I'm only a ignorant cuss from the Tennessee cane, but I'll be shot if your keeping company with this fellow ain't cost you a pretty penny already."

Young Humphrey laughed uneasily, thinking of his four hundred dollars, and glancing from the corner of his eye at his patron.

"—— your gall!" softly hissed the gambler. "I'll call that trick on you."

"But not with that toy," chuckled Crockett, flashing a long-barrel pistol from his hunting-shirt, and resting the muzzle against the immaculate ruffles. "Take your hand from your wescoat pocket—and do it slow."

The gambler obeyed, only pin-pricks of black showing through his lids. Crockett leaned his rifle against the wall, and with his left hand removed a silver-mounted derringer from the pocket.

"Usually find these critters in pairs," he mused aloud, exploring the other pocket and pulling forth a second derringer.

He tossed the brace behind the bar at the feet of the frightened bartender. Cherokee's lean visage was ghastly and he wet his lips with the point of his tongue, waiting for the second when the placid hunter would be off his guard. The men at the bar began to give room, knowing a deadly insult had been heaped on the gambler. He had been held up to ridicule, and disarmed, in the presence of those who never had dared to affront him.

One man at the end of the bar dropped his glass with a smash and rubbed his eyes and gasped incredulously.

Cherokee knew the crowd were waiting for him to take action. Never removing his frozen gaze from the dark eyes of the hunter, he quietly began:

"My man, you've made a nuisance of yourself. I'm pleased to see you know something about firearms. Suppose we

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step outside and walk down the bank a bit. There's no need of mussing up our host's place."

Crockett listened to the invitation with a whimsical smile playing 'round his lips; but young Humphrey broke in:

"No, no, Cherokee! No killings. Let's drink and forget it."

"Curse you! Am I to be backed down because a lout in leather clothes and stinking of the cane gets the drop on me?" gritted the gambler, but never shifting his baleful gaze.

"But you did speak first, Cherokee," Humphrey persisted. "And, really, he wasn't bothering us any."

"Will you shut up?" hissed the gambler.

"Now, just hold on a minute," purred Crockett, stepping back and lowering his pistol. "Let a poor cuss from Tennessee get in a word. I begin to 'low you're a fancy fighter. Is that it?"

"I'm not responsible for what you 'low, you baboon," the gambler retorted, his gaze glittering as he noted Crockett's lessening of caution. "I ask you to take a walk with me. I'll pay for a drink. The man who comes back is welcome to it."

"Oh, I don't want you to buy me a drink," Crockett demurred, rubbing the muzzle of the pistol against his nose.

The gamber thrust his hand into his pocket as though fumbling for a coin. At the same time the man who had broken his glass rushed down the room, shouting in great glee, and cried out—

"Colonel Crockett, by all big catfish!"

CROCKETT turned his head and in joyful surprize beheld the broad red face and wide grin of unalloyed pleasure. Then the gambler was upon him, his right hand armed with a knife. Crockett caught up the bosom of the faultless shirt and slammed him against the bar, and jammed the pistol's muzzle into his side.

"Now, don't you get sweated up any," Crockett calmly advised. "And drop that knife. That's much better. If we keep on the bartender will have enough weapons to set up housekeeping. I'm in town on business, but don't fret that I can't find time for a little fun."

Still holding the gambler against the bar he turned his head and greeted the new comer.

"As sure as cotton's selling for twenty-five dollars a hundred it's Cap'n Ned Stanly, of the *Storm King*," Crockett cried. "I'll sing psalms over a dead horse if I ain't tickled to see you, Ned."

"Davie, Davie Crockett," gurgled the captain. "After you get through funning we sure must visit. But your friend seems ill."

And he turned distended eyes on the gambler.

"I 'lowed I felt him slumping and slipping," Crockett replied, returning his gaze to Cherokee and removing his pistol. "Must 'a' hurt him without knowing it."

And he studied the gambler curiously.

Cherokee presented a curious sight. His shoulders were sagging, his mouth was agape, and for once the habitués of the bar knew how he must look when fear clutched his soul. His eyes were glaring at the long pistol and not at the hunter, however; and his facial expression was that of one hypnotized and imagining the horrible. The pistol was the one Crockett had appropriated in the cave and had retained because of its rifled barrel. Crockett stepped back and gently asked—

"Have you been took with a shock?"

Cherokee reached a shaky hand for a bottle and filled a glass to the brim and tossed it off. Straightening up he hoarsely said—

"The notches on your gun show you're a killer."

"Who? Me? I've killed quite a few bears, some Injuns, and a few skunks that we call white men," Crockett modestly replied.

"And I've got a thousand dollars that says he can kill you, you infernal pirut!" roared Captain Stanly, shaking his fist in the gambler's face. "Your being allowed to live is a disgrace to the river."

"I'll just take that bet," whispered Cherokee.

"Hold your horses, Ned Stanly. I'm against gambling. It's meaner'n stealing aigs."

"Your beef-faced friend has made a wager and I have accepted it. I shall hold him to it," fiercely cried the gambler, "I will put up my thousand at this bar before noon. You'll cover it, or forever be known as a yaller dog and a sneak."

"I'm against gambling," Crockett quietly repeated. "But in most of my habits I can stretch a point to help a friend. Then again the terms of the bet don't set any particular time."

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"Captain Stanly knows the code of the river. He's made a bet. Once my money's up he must cover it. I'll see the game is played out inside of twenty-four hours," coldly retorted Cherokee.

And squaring his shoulders and with head erect he walked from the room, looking neither to right nor left.

"Well, Davie, I'm in something of a hole," grinned the captain, rubbing his head dubiously. "I mustn't drag you into any cussedness, but what that —— villain says is true. If I don't make good with the thousand I'll have to quit the river. Well, well. A thousand won't break me. Let's licker. Derned queer he should act so scared one minute, almost fainting away like a woman, then come back drooling for blood. Derned queer. He's game, you know. Game as he is devilish. Not only a gambler, either; for they don't gamble in the River Palace, and that's where he hangs out—there and the Annex."

"River Palace, eh? Long building, one end sticking out over the water? I seen it when I was coming along. Looks like they might do anything there."

"They will—they do."

"The Annex must be the house next to the Palace."

"That's it. Many a river-man's gone in there, chasing a woman, and never come out again. They don't want any local trade. Man's got to be a stranger to get in. Hi, lad!"

This last to young Humphrey, who stood alone, dejected and weary.

Humphrey sidled up, curious to know more about Colonel Crockett, whose reputation had been carried by broadhorn, periagua and skiff throughout the valley. He resented the trifling form of salutation, however. Captain Ned Stanly never stood on ceremony with youngsters, and bluntly demanded:

"What do you know about the River Palace? You seem to be sailing with Cherokee. Did he ever take you there?"

The young man flared up and would have answered hotly had not Crockett's kindly gaze softened him.

"No," he slowly admitted. "I reckon I know the ropes 'round this place as well as the next, but Cherokee never asks company to the Palace."

"Do they run any games there?"

"I don't know. If they do it's just among themselves."

"Meaning just who by that?" shot in Crockett.

"Why, among themselves. Just among those who hang out there. I s'pose you'd call it a regular gang. Sometimes strangers, men coming and going, but never any of the men who live on top or under the hill here."

"The Annex is for their women," mumbled Stanly.

"We're much obliged, lad. Now, take my advice and have a long sleep and then trot home. I can tell by your face you've got a home, and a good one. Better stick pretty close there. Your friend, Cherokee, ain't taken anything but your money so far; but if you follow him he'll steal your honor and your life."

"Reckon I can take care of myself," haughtily replied Humphrey, stalking to the door.

"Good boy, if not coaxed into deviltry," mused Crockett. "Now, this gambler's sick spell. Then he asked about the notches on my gun——"

"I'd sworn the devil himself couldn't 'a' made him take water!" the captain broke in.

"It all goes to prove what I've been suspecting. He wa'n't scared of me. He was scared of that gun. Cap'n Ned, I got that gun in a mighty queer place. The fellow who cut the notches must 'a' been some p'izen. The gambling cuss knew the gun. It threw him off his nerve to see it here in Natchez-under-the-hill and in the paws of a bear-hunter. Yes; I begin to see a light. If I meet up with him again I reckon you'll win that wager."

"Nobly spoken, Davie! If you will only stretch a point and kill him I'll be a heap obliged," the captain fervently declared. "It ain't the money so much as it is to have him crowing over me between here and the gulf. If you can put out his light—and never a man needed snuffing more—I'll go on to New Orleans rejoicing."

"Go on to New Orleans? If you come in this morning why didn't I see you? I was on the *John Scott*."

"——! I've been hung up here two days with a busted shaft. Crew's just getting it into shape. I shall cast off tonight. You'd noticed the old *Storm King* if I hadn't shifted her moorings down-stream a bit, right back of that derned River Palace."

"Why, this is luck! You was here when a

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down-boat pulled in a few hours ahead of the *John Scott*. We was in sight of her smoke most of the way."

"The *Golden Emperor*. Cap'n Ames. Mighty good friend of mine, even if he did give me the laugh for being hitched up here like a broadhorn on a sand-bar."

"Did you notice among the passengers a young woman come ashore with a man?"

"There was a young woman with a bird-cage. Lives on top of the hill. There was one with two babies and a colored nurse——"

"No, no. This would be a young girl, come not quite to my shoulder. Little chap. Has very light hair, looks almost yaller——"

"I'll bet it's the one I seen!" exploded the captain, bringing his fist down on the bar. "I didn't see them land from the *Emperor*, but they was together and walking down the river road, walking close, too. Say, she was hooking her hands over one of his shoulders and looking up into his face."

"TILLIE CURTES, as sure as the Missoury's muddy! Hurrah!" softly exulted the hunter.

"I took them for father and daughter. He looked like a deep-water skipper. Big, full beard. Yes, she was a little thing, all right. Yaller hair. And pretty enough to eat. Oh, hum."

"What do you mean by that humming?"

"Why, the rest sort of sp'iles it all," sighed the captain. "They turned into the River Annex, next to the Palace, you know. Both places are run by the same skunk. I was in the pilot-house, listening to my mate try some new swear-words on the engine-crew, and seen them. Within fifty feet of them. They were walking toward me when they turned in. She was looking up into his face, he walking with his hands behind his back, looking down at his boots. Seeing as how the Annex is the Annex, Davie, that sort of sp'iles it."

"It shows there's something we don't understand. That young lady comes of a tip-top family. She's in love with a young planter I'm acquainted with. Believe me, Cap'n Ned, she never know'd what the Annex is."

"Then all the more reason she should quit it humping," the captain tersely replied.

Crockett scowled and looked worried. It did not square with his conception of the young lady to find her willingly tarrying in the town under the hill. For her to take up her abode in the Annex was unthinkable; yet Captain Stanly had famous eyesight. Her confidence in the man he had seen climbing from the tender aboard the *Golden Emperor* was another baffling point. He was still pondering over the problem when there came a wave of confusion down the bar, and he looked up to behold a boy of sixteen or seventeen years, whose disordered appearance suggested a street-fight, and whose tears obviously advertised a volcanic wrath.

The youth spied them at the head of the bar and ran to them, choking out:

"Cap'n Stanly! Cap'n Stanly!"

For a moment he could not get beyond these two words. His face twisted and grimaced as he fought to control his emotions.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" sternly demanded the captain. "What do you mean, you young rip, by disturbing two gentlemen like this. Why ain't you aboard ship where you belong?"

"Why not let him tell it, Ned?" suggested Crockett.

"If I'd had a gun I wouldn't be here," hoarsely informed the boy. "Those miserable cutthroats that hang out at the Palace jumped me as I was going by and robbed me of fifty dollars the steward gave me to pay a bill."

"By the eternal!" yelled Captain Stanly, squaring about and pulling his hat over his eyes. "I'll go down and clean ship."

"Toting any weapons?" asked Crockett, catching him by the arm and drawing him back.

"I don't need nothing but my two fists to put the fear of God into that rotten bunch," bellowed the captain.

"Maybe not; but we'll look the tree over and see if it's a bear or a coon before we go ahead much further," said Crockett, retaining his grasp on his friend's arm. "See here, my boy; tell us just how it happened."

The youth hesitated, and the captain roared—

"Speak out, you young whelp."

"Why, sir, it isn't much to tell. I come ashore below the Annex and was passing the Palace when a man inside the doorway said something and three skunks jumped out and went through my clothes and took the

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money and cuffed me 'round. It was all done before you could count four."

"Who was the man who 'said something'?" asked Crockett.

"I don't know. I could only see his head. Pale face and a mighty pretty shirt, if the the top of the ruffles meant anything."

"It's him, Neddy," murmured Crockett.

"The —— blackleg!" choked Captain Stanly.

"The signs look like he was Cherokee," agreed Crockett. "Bear-tree, all right, and you ain't even loaded for coon. Now, Ned, we'll just step softly. There's more to it than just the taking the money from the boy. Looks like they wanted you, perhaps me, to hustle down there to even things up. I never play the other man's game. I always want to have a game of my own. Here, finish your drink and we'll look things over. No need of letting their spies see if we've taken their bait or spit it out. And you, boy, dust out a back way and streak it back to the boat."

"Shall I, sir?" timidly asked the youth.

"Didn't you hear Colonel Crockett bleat, you young hound!" growled the captain. "Want to stick 'round till Andy Jackson gives you orders?"

On hearing the name of Colonel Crockett the anger and doubt fled from the boy's eyes, and he could only stare worshipfully at the hunter. Then with an awkward duck of the head he scurried through a rear exit. Crockett thrust his hand through the captain's arm, and informed:

"I'll run this craft for a spell. You're only the captain and part owner. I'm the pilot. You put a thousand dollars up at the bar before noon. After doing that you stick mighty close to your boat till I come along. I'll scout a little and report progress before sundown."

"I'd forgotten that wager," mumbled the captain. "I'll step into Henry's place upstreet and get the cash on my notes. But if you think I'm going aboard the *Storm King* and hide my old head——"

"I don't think, I know," Crockett tersely interrupted. "You'd be as easy meat as the boy. Can't you see they're making a bid for you to come down there? Don't you understand they knew the boy belonged to your boat when he come ashore below the Annex? And of course they knew he would find you with me, and tell his story. And they figgered you'n' me would get het up and make for the Palace hellytibent, and rush into the waiting arms of Cherokee and his friends.

"They'd claim self-defense, saying I was following up a quarrel I'd started in the Welcome Hand, and that you, considerably loaded with licker, come along to lend me a hand. Then the *Storm King* would have a new cap'n, and the folks back home would probably sell my dogs. Providing a bear can't read I never blame him for walking into a trap; but a human being is supposed to have more sense, especially when he's seen the bait put out for him."

Captain Stanly quieted down, and meekly surrendered.

"All right, Davie. I reckon you know best. I'll wait for you to come aboard if you'll promise not to sneak in there alone."

"I ain't tired of living yet," grinned Crockett. "When I get ready to go in I'll go in right."

They parted at the door with a careless wave of the hand. Crockett watched his friend trudge truculently down to Henry's place, then turned back and began ascending to the town on top of the bluff. As he slowly climbed the steep street he saw a man detach himself from the corner of the saloon and hurry down the river road. He knew this was a spy, sent to dog his and the captain's steps.

Half-way up the hill he halted at a spot overlooking the town below. He could see the Palace clearly. Several loungers were grouped in front of it, probably waiting for the spy's return. What impressed him the most as he gazed was the proximity of the Palace to the river. The water was high and he believed any one could drop into a boat from one of the rear windows.

"Or drop a murdered man overboard," he softly exclaimed. "The back of that shack is set high on stilts a purpose to keep close to the river without being washed away."

The front of the Annex showed beyond the Palace, but there were no loungers before it. He returned to the study of the Palace. It was long and low and stained by time and the elements. Innumerable crimes had been perpetrated within its walls, for law and order had not yet set its firm grasp on the Mississippi Valley. Beyond the Palace rose the upper deck of the *Storm King*, the boat appearing, from the hunters' position, to be joined on to the iniquitous

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den. The combination was grotesque, decay and dilapidation united with the white and gold of the passenger-boat. For some minutes Crockett stood and stared at the Palace, and at last began to chuckle softly. The more he considered his inspiration the more it delighted him; and although he stifled his mirth he felt compelled to take off his fur hat and strike it violently against his leg.

"Well, we'll now see what'll happen, as old Johnson said when he poured a gourd of water into some melting lead."

And he continued up the road to enjoy the purity of the heights.

IT WAS on the edge of evening and lights were glowing in the Palace when Crockett slipped aboard the *Storm King* and found Captain Stanly pouring half a pint of slugs into a shotgun.

"I was just going out to find you, Colonel," he gravely saluted. "I'm painted for war. What do you think?"

"Well, what do I think?"

"Why, that low-down Cherokee never put up any thousand dollars. The Welcome Hand sent me down my money this afternoon, with word that the gambler hadn't lived up to his bargain and that the bar couldn't hold my money any longer. But I'll slip over to the Palace and collect the fifty dollars they stole."

"You put that gun away and listen to reason and you'll do me a good turn and get more'n fifty dollars' worth of Simon-pure fun," Crockett said.

"I'm a master hand for fun. Go ahead."

"In the Annex is a young woman I must see and talk with. I caught a glimpse of her at a upper winder this afternoon while scouting. But if I should try to get in there the gang from the Palace would make mighty short work of me. That gambling fellow, Cherokee, is in the Palace playing solitairy at one of the winders. He's waiting for some word before he begins some dirty work."

"The cheap vermin! Never put up his money! You've got him scared, Colonel. I reckon Natchez won't have any use for him when every one hears how he squealed."

"He'd 'a' put up the money fast enough, and gone out to earn it if some one hadn't called him off. If we knew the truth I 'low we wouldn't be a bit surprized at his seeming to show the white feather. But there's something worse'n bear up the tree. In my scouting 'round this afternoon I picked up enough to know he ain't gun-shy any; so something, or some one is holding him back.

"I can't explain it to you, Ned, but the people who used to own the pistol I'm toting have a word to say about what Cherokee shall do. They've said it. It's mighty big game, and Cherokee's taking orders. Now, here's where you come in and help me amazingly, and get your million dollars' worth of fun. Pretty soon, when it gets a bit darker, you 'n' me will give them varments the surprize of their lives. They couldn't be more surprized if they woke up in the morning and learned they'd all been elected to Congress."

"I hear you talking. Lead another keerd," snapped the captain.

"When can you pull out?"

"Steam up. Oughter be going now. Been waiting for you."

"About fifty feet of pulling-out will do nicely. I'm going ashore. You send two men you can trust with the end of a hawser to the back of the Palace. They can float underneath in the tender. Fix the hawser to one of the cross supports and be sure you have the other end made fast to something stout on your stern. Just as soon as the rope's made fast at both ends blow a short and long whistle. When I hear that I'll begin my part. Be ready to go ahead fifty feet or more and when you hear one of them back winders bust into flinders just chuck the steam to her, and go ahead."

"Oh, Davie Crockett! I begin to see the blessed light."

And dropping his gun the captain gave a dancing pantomime of great joy.

"After it's all happened of course you'll cast off your hawser. Then stand by with your crew ready to keep off the enemy, and watch out for me to come aboard in something of a hurry."

"Get along ashore! You'll hear the whistle in no time,'" the captain eagerly urged.

Lights were now blooming along the riverfront. From the bluff shone the radiance of homes. Under the hill wicked eyes twinkled in brothel and hell. Crockett slipped from the bow to the deck of a broadhorn and nimbly made his way to the bank, landing some distance below the Annex. Taking the opposite side of the road and

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moving cautiously he succeeded in gaining the rear of a hovel directly opposite the Palace. The place was well filled, but very quiet. No sounds of laughter or song, although the bar was doing a rushing business. A steamboat whistle sounded twice, a short and long blast.

In the side of the Palace next to the Annex was a door reserved for the use of the privileged. Thrusting the long pistol into the front of his hunting-shirt and carrying his rifle across his left arm Crockett stole from cover and glided across the road. Several men before the open doorway of the saloon caught a glimpse of his figure, but the night was thickening and they failed to identify it. Still they observed he was making in between the Annex and the saloon, forbidden ground even for many regular frequenters of the Palace; and there was a general movement to rush after him.

"Some scut of a river-man," cried one of the group, holding back.

"Cherokee says never let any one make the river between the buildings," reminded another, running to the corner of the Palace, around which the hunter had now disappeared.

A second before the men turned the corner Crockett disappeared in the private doorway. He halted with the door all but closed. The group paused and glanced about, and one said:

"River-man all right. He's boarded one of them boats. Time we had a drink."

As they filed back Crockett softly closed the door and stole down a short passageway to a door which led in behind the long bar. As he was about to open the door some one inside the bar anticipated him, and for a moment stood stupid with surprize at finding himself facing a stranger. Recovering his senses the man sought to duck by, but with a drive of his fist the hunter hurled him back against the legs of the three bartenders. The next moment the patrons of the Palace stared bewildered to behold the deerskin figure standing behind the bar, the three bartenders grouped at one end, undecided what they should do.

Cherokee glanced up from his game of solitaire and held a card suspended in mid-air, wondering if it were true or a trick of the imagination. As he observed the cowering bartenders he realized the unexpected had happened, that the man the gang had stalked throughout the afternoon, had boldly invaded the lair.

"Every man keep his place," sternly ordered Crockett, catching a bartender by the neck and hurling him against his mates as the man essayed to steal through the door.

With a blasphemous shout of triumph Cherokee leaped to his feet, a pistol in each hand, and darted forward, firing as he came. Whipping the pistol from the bosom of his hunting-shirt Crockett brought it down and fired, and the gambler spun about and fell on his face with a bullet between his eyes.

As this tragedy terminated a score of men recovered their scattered senses, and howling curses made for the door, some firing pistols toward the bar as they surged forward. Others, more courageous, charged the bar. Crockett wheeled and caught a bartender armed with a chair and threw him over and down on to the mob. The bar was built high and thick for protection, and the men serving drinks stood several feet above their patrons. The remaining bartenders quickly followed their mate.

One man, sprawled across a table in the far corner, to all appearances a sodden and drunken figure, now displayed marvelous agility in making for an exit.

One leap carried him half across the room. Another took him to a window. Crockett swung Old Betsy around and endeavored to wing him, but was a second too late. With a crash of broken glass he dived through the window, taking the sash with him. It was Hogan.

Now the pack had been whipped into a determined assault and came forward in full cry. Crockett seized a bottle to hurl through a window, but dropped as he felt a grinding vibration beneath his feet. With a backward spring he gained the door opening into the passageway, and as he cleared it he felt the Palace sliding into the river. Hogan's violent exit had been accepted by Captain Stanly as the signal for him to go ahead.

Throwing open the outer door Crockett darted to the door of the Annex, mumbling—

"Nip and tuck!"

And the Palace crashed down from its high stilts and lay with one end half submerged in the river.

Pandemonium reigned about the wrecked river-house, but inside the Annex no one seemed to be stirring. The hunter glided up the stairs and gained the top before he

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met with any opposition. Then a door opened and a tall man stepped out. The light from the room behind him threw Crockett's face into bold relief and at the same time half-blinded the hunter. The man jumped to grapple him. Crockett ducked under his outstretched arms and gave him a mighty blow over the kidneys with his elbow in passing. Headlong down the stairs shot the man. To the upper end of the hall raced the hunter.

He had marked the room that afternoon when the girl appeared at the window for a moment. Shaking the door he softly called out—

"Miss Tillie Curtes, come here."

"Go way! Oh, go way!" a frightened woman's voice moaned.

"I'm Davie Crockett, sent by your father to rescue you! Open the door."

"But I've been rescued. Go way! go way!"

"——!" groaned Crockett under his breath, and with a hunch of his shoulder he broke down the door.

The woman shrieked and crumpled up on the floor. Her cry was smothered in the babel of shouts now rising along the river front and concentrating 'round the mysteriously wrecked building.

Bending over the girl Crockett knew she had fainted. Her hair was yellow and she was below medium height.

"Perhaps it's best this way," Crockett told himself, blowing out the candle and sweeping her up in his arms.

The street below was now in great confusion. Under cover of the clamor Crockett carried the insensible girl through the hall and down the stairs. Turning away from the street door he passed through the house to a window opening on to the river. This he kicked out and lifted the girl to the ground. Another step took him aboard a "broadhorn," the crew of which had swarmed ashore to marvel at the strange catastrophe.

Without any interruption Crockett traversed the length of the "broadhorn," crossed over a barge and stood within ten feet of the freight deck of the *Storm King*. Captain Ned had been anxiously watching for him, and saw him at once, and had the gangplank run out. As the hunter brought his unconscious burden aboard, the captain indignantly declared:

"I'll sue whoever owns that shack! Splashed water all over the stern! Dod rot 'em!"

CHAPTER IX

ONE CANDIDATE'S PLATFORM

AFTER committing the girl to the care of a stewardess Crockett confided to Captain Stanly:

"The young lady is Matilda Curtes, Judge Curtes' daughter—Judge Curtes, of Jackson, Tennessee."

"Holy smoke! Judge Curtes' girl? And in Natchez-under-the-hill!"

"She was kidnaped from her home by Potter Dick's gang and brought down-river by way of the Obion. The judge got up a society to run down Dick. Public-spirited man. Going to Congress, too. And I've killed Cherokee. He was one of the gang."

"He's cheated me out of a thousand!" bitterly complained the captain. "Didn't dare fight you and squealed on his bet."

"No; give the devil his due. He sort of seemed hungry to get at me, come a-flying pistols barking. I 'low his money would 'a' been posted at the bar right smart if he'd been free to do as he wanted to. I figger it that he was under orders to do certain things, such as guard the girl maybe. There's a kink right there, Ned. The girl went to the Annex of her own free will. When I tried to get her to come out of her room she said she'd already been rescued. Some one fooled her. But let that go till I have a talk with her. Cherokee, I reckon, was under orders not to pick any fights on the street. That didn't stop him getting even with me and you if he could get us into the Palace. So he held up your younker."

"Potter Dick's a bad man to have against you," muttered the captain. "You can't ever tell who's his spy. I've probably got one right on this boat. Stole two thousand dollars' worth of freight from us a few months ago. We never complained. Cheaper to let them things go and call it paying a fine, or a license. But when it comes to stealing young women! I wish it had been him in place of Cherokee you wiped out."

"There was another man there that's known as Hogan, pretends to be a boatman, that I hankered to get. But he leaped through the winder. Looked like he'd been drunk for a year. Can't be of much account to the gang. Now you must set me and the

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girl on an up-river boat. I must get her back to the Obion and in her father's arms, or he'll go crazy."

"We're starting now," comforted the captain. "By George! It's high time. The Palace is on fire! Look at them boatmen coming on the hump to get their sand-crabs out on the river!"

And he darted away to supervise the safety of the *Storm King*.

Crockett stared in deep fascination at the faint ruddy glow expanding above the wrecked building. River-men, drunk and sober, had already taken the alarm and were swarming from the bank to work their boats away from the danger zone. As the *Storm King* paddled to the middle of the river, yellow flames burst from that portion of the building resting on land and soon caught the roof of the Annex.

"Two traps gone. Riddance to worse than rubbish," the hunter muttered.

Next he fell to pondering over Hogan, and wondered what he was now essaying.

"The cuss was some upset at seeing me," he chuckled. "But I'd give a term in Congress to know more about the man with the whiskers, and why the girl cottoned to him. That's the queer part of this mess."

A hand touched his arm and he looked down to behold the smiling face of the stewardess.

"Young missis done ask fo' you, Col. Crockett, somethin' promiscus," she informed. "Jes' done 'bout gone out her haid."

She led the way up the stairs to the second tier of staterooms, and down a corridor plethoric with gilt and plush, and rapped softly on a door. The door flew open and Matilda Curtes, frightened of eye and white-faced, stood confronting the hunter. Her hair was in tantalizing disarray, her small figure quivered with suppressed emotion.

"You are Colonel Davie Crockett? I've heard my father, Judge Curtes, speak of you often," she hurriedly began. "I'm badly upset. I must have fainted. When I came to there was the hideous yelling and the light of a fire. I'm still confused——"

"Don't you fret any," soothed Crockett, patting her arm. "I'm some mixed up myself."

"Tell me, where's Mr.—" she halted and bit her lip, mumbling, "I was forgetting my promise. I mean the gentleman who rescued me at the peril of his life from those fearful villains."

Crockett dismissed the stewardess, who was lingering two staterooms away, and stepped inside Miss Curtes' room long enough to reload his long pistol.

"Don't be scared," he said as she watched him with frightened gaze. "Now I reckon we can talk in the open."

He conducted her down the corridor to the grand salon and selected a divan where the opportunity for eavesdropping was reduced to the minimum. After she was seated he gently asked—

"You're speaking about the man with the whiskers?"

"He wears a beard. Where is he? Why wasn't he in that house when you came in?"

"Couldn't say," Crockett answered. "But what interests me most is, why did he take you there? That ain't a nice place for Judge Curtes' daughter."

"He explained that, but he knew it was the safest place we could hide in until he could take me back to my father," she eagerly replied. "He risked his life to save me. If the villains found him they'd hunt him down, no matter where he went. But they'd never look for him or me in that place."

"You poor child! You really 'low that chap was really scared of——"

"He is no coward," she fiercely interrupted and sitting very erect. "What you call being scared was merely the natural caution of a man trying to assist a woman from a terrible danger. He killed several of the gang in rescuing me. We went into hiding for my sake. He said he must not be killed until I was back with my father."

"Who is he?" Crockett bluntly demanded.

"I can't tell you. He's no one you know. But I can vouch for him. So will my father. He made me promise on my sacred word of honor not to mention his name to any one."

"Not even your father?"

"Not even to him. He knows his life won't be worth a penny once Potter Dick learns what he's done. I suppose he'll tell father everything in confidence when we get back; it will almost be necessary, I reckon. But that's his business. I'm pledged to say never a word—well, not until Potter Dick is dead."

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"Keeping promises never hurt any one," agreed Crockett. "But there's other things you can tell. We've got plenty of time; suppose you give me the whole shooting-match, beginning with your capture."

She shivered as though loath to review her experiences, then tilted her small head aggressively, and complied:

"I WAS riding a few miles outside of Jackson, following the old Indian trail. Four men, wearing masks, leaped from the bushes and dragged me from my horse and gagged and blindfolded me before I could realize what had happened. Then they took me through the woods to a cabin. I was kept there a day and a night. On my promise not to make any noise they took the bandage off my eyes, removed the gag, and left me alone. Of course I knew they were close by. They brought me food and water. Only one man talked any, and he spoke only when getting me to promise not to give any alarm.

"Then I was blindfolded and gagged and put on a horse, not my own, and taken through the woods to another cabin. We got there at night. On the next day blindfolded and gagged again, I was taken to a cave. That night they refused to remove the gag and even tied my hands and feet. Now I was under no promise. The guards slept outside the cave somewhere, and I managed to free my hands and feet. It was pitch dark. The men outside were snoring. I think they had been drinking; anyway, they slept very soundly; and I stole by them and found myself in woods.

"They must have missed me very soon, for I'd gone only a little way when I heard them coming after me. I was confused and didn't know which direction to take, and I screamed. If I'd kept still and crawled into some hole I don't think they'd found me. But when I lost my head and screamed a man burst through the undergrowth and seized me and clapped a hand over my mouth. There was much shouting and firing of guns. I fainted and when I came to my senses I was back in the cave, bound and gagged.

"I think they must have been chased, for they were in the cave with me and acted nervous; I could tell by their voices although they spoke only a few words. One of them said it was 'getting too warm' and that I ought to be 'dismissed,' and my spirits rose high. All I asked was to be set free to find my way back home. Another said it would never do, and added, 'The chief would slice our throats.'

"That nearly made me faint again. That same day—I think it must have been the same day, but I was badly mixed up as to time—I was put on a horse and taken quite distance through the woods to a river. It was a long, hard ride. I was heavily blindfolded, but I could feel the sun warm on my head and I knew it wasn't night."

"During all this time did you hear the name of Hogan?" Crockett interrupted.

"No names were spoken at all. The men never spoke in my hearing only to tell me what to do, except the time in the cave when they thought I was unconscious. Then only the few words I've told you."

"Did you know any of their voices?"

"No. They talked rough, like river-men."

"All right. Go ahead, full steam."

"A terrible storm broke just as I was taken on to a boat and put in a little bit of a room."

"When you went on board how many men were there? Could you tell by counting their voices?"

"I don't think any men were there. I was blindfolded, but I heard no one speak as we went aboard. After I was put in the tiny room I was freed of the gag and ropes on my promise not to cry out. I couldn't have called out anyway; I'd been gagged so long. There was no chance to escape. In a room next to me were my captors. I recognized four different voices. They talked but little. I fell asleep. When I woke up the boat was in motion and I was very faint. There was a long spell of pitching up and down, with logs bumping against the boat.

"Once they handed in some meat and water. I think I ate something. I know I drank all the water. Then things got badly mixed up. When they took me from the boat it was night. This time I was not gagged, nor blindfolded. They led me a long distance through the woods over a narrow path to a large cabin. It was strongly built. Now they didn't seem to worry about my making a noise and let me walk 'round as I would. They seemed much relieved, like their business was

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nearly ended, and seemed free to drink from a jug.

"They kept their masks on, but after three of them took a light and said they were going back to the boat, the fourth man remaining at the cabin took his mask off. He was a horrible creature and I wished he had kept his face covered. Then I couldn't have seen the way he looked at me. When he began cooking supper I went into an adjoining room to get away from his wicked eyes."

"Only four men? Didn't you see a fifth?" Crockett demanded.

She glanced at him in surprize.

"There were only four. I've told you that. After a time one of the three that went to the boat came running back, yelling how he'd killed 'Belt,' and that 'Pete' was after him. That was the first time a man's name was spoken. I peeped out the door and saw the man at the stove turn and pick up a rifle."

She paused and stared 'round the salon, her set gaze registering the horror of the tragedy she was now reviewing.

"Then you were rescued," softly encouraged Crockett.

With a little gasp she buried her face in her hands and gave way to tears. Finally mastering her weakness she raised her head, and whispered:

"Yes, yes. I felt I must die. I would have been glad to die. Then the door flew open and—my dear friend—leaped in and shot the ruffians down. I didn't know him at first. But I soon knew him. He warned me to keep cool, to do as he said. He led me through the night to where boats land. He took a basket-torch with him, such as they use on steamboats. A boat was whistling up-stream. My rescuer signaled and the tender was sent ashore and took us off. And we were safe for the time. Even then the villains tried to get me. They chased down to the bank and fired on us. The crew and some of the passengers fired back."

"I'll bet one of them run into a stump," murmured Crockett. "What else?"

"My protector was much worried. It was a down-river boat, and he told me I had been the captive of Potter Dick, whose spies and tools are working along the whole length of the river. He kept looking back to the woods and I knew he feared pursuit. At last he seemed much relieved and told me how he had followed the kidnapers in a small boat and tracked them to the cabin, which is on the Arkansas side. He waited till the gang separated.

"I asked him if we couldn't appeal to the captain, for every one knows my father. He said the captain could only afford us protection while we were on the boat and that our lives wouldn't be safe even then. Once we were landed the gang would be sure to try to pick up the trail. He planned to land at Memphis, where we could take the Indian trail back to Jackson; but as the boat drew in he pulled me behind some freight and pointed out three men he suspected of being some of Dick's outlaws. The only thing to do was keep on down to Natchez."

"And at Natchez he was naturally scared of being found by some of them dogs and so hid you in that low-down den as the most likely place for them to overlook," completed Crockett.

She nodded eagerly, and added:

"I was perfectly safe while there. No one suspected anything. No one came near my end of the building. He wouldn't be suspected unless seen with me. So he went over the upper as well as the lower town, thinking at first we could get horses and ride to Washington and get a posse to escort us home. But there was always the dread of finding that some man you trusted was one of Potter Dick's men. Even sworn officers of the law might be his men. Those who were honest men would hesitate to help us, once they knew we were flying from Dick. I agreed with him it would be safer for us to remain in hiding until we could catch an up-river boat. And now——"

She burst into tears and sobbed most piteously.

Crockett, greatly alarmed, pleaded:

"Don't do that, you poor little kitten. You know I'll take you back home all right. All the Potter Dicks between Natchez and hell can't stop us. You must know you're safe now."

"Oh, I know I can trust you to get me home in safety, Colonel Crockett," she cried. "But my friend! Something terrible happened back there just before you came. I heard shouts and cries and guns fired off—then a crash. My friend did not come. I—I fear he must be killed."

"I hope—I hope everything is all right,"

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mumbled Crockett. "Anyway, the main thing is to get you back to Jackson. Wish I knew the name of your friend. I might go back and help him."

"I wish I could tell you, but my promise won't let me," she sighed. "He says his life won't be worth a penny, let him go where he will, if it's known he defied Potter Dick."

"That Dick is a p'izenous cuss, Miss Tillie. A bad man to have on your trail."

"And father organized a society to hunt him down," she shuddered. "Perhaps that's why they stole me. I'm so worried about father. I keep thinking something will happen to him before we can get home."

"The judge is all right. Fine and fit as a fiddle. No Potter Dick can get the bulge on our next congressman," he comforted. "And how about Jim Macon?"

"Jimmy. Mr. Macon," she softly repeated, her face glowing. Then devoutly, "Thank heavens! He isn't in the shadow of it."

"I 'low Jim will be some glad to see you back," Crockett reminded.

"I hope he hasn't gone on any wild-goose chase hunting for me," she worried. "Jim is, well, impulsive."

Captain Stanly now came up and was presented to the girl.

"You two come in and eat with me," he commanded. "We'll be meeting a boat below the next bend, and I can't lose you until we've had a snack together. Miss Curtes, remember me to your distinguished father. The river is proud of men like him and Colonel Crockett."

"Old Tennessee has many noble gentlemen left, even if some scum do try to besmirch her fair name," she proudly said. Then with a ghost of a smile, "And Colonel Crockett is simply lovely."

THE captain of the up-river boat was delighted at the opportunity of obliging Captain Stanly, Judge Curtes and his pretty daughter, and the renowned Colonel Crockett. As he remarked to Crockett it was a "reg'lar windfall" of good luck. He not only would land them at the mouth of the Obion, but he would loan them a boat so that they could make the hunter's cabin with the least delay and inconvenience.

As the result of this generous aid Crockett paralyzed young Henry's mental faculties by rowing ashore at sunrise one beautiful morning and helping Miss Tillie to land at the foot of the knoll.

"By jing! The colonel's turned the trick!" yelled young Henry in a general apostrophe to sky and forest.

And with a wild yell of exultation he ran down the bank, only to be precipitated into confusion by one smiling glance from the girl with the wonderful hair.

"Abe, this is Miss Matilda Curtes—Tillie to her friends—the girl I 'lowed to fetch back to her dad. Miss Tillie, this is young Abe Henry, who come out here with me to put up a cabin. I'm mighty sorry Mrs. Crockett and the young 'uns ain't here. I've got some likely girls, you know. Abe, you make Owens hot-foot and fetch back his horse." Then to the girl: "He's my neighbor. Lives seven miles up-stream. I'd go, but perhaps I'd best stay here."

"Oh, please do stay," she urged with a little shiver, sensing a menace in the brooding desolation.

During the trip up-river she had quite recovered her spirits; but there was a brooding silence about the forest that suggested a lull just before things begin to happen.

Henry cut into the woods while Crockett helped the girl up the bank.

"You'll find some cold meat and some coffee," he said. "Don't quit the cabin for a minute. You'll be perfectly safe. I shall be near at hand even if you don't see me. Just going to scout a trifle."

"You won't go far?" she begged, the old terror seizing her.

"No, no. I'll be right on hand even when out of sight. There's no danger; only keep indoors," he calmed.

Crockett did not believe he had been followed, but to make sure he purposed making the cabin a trap with the girl as the bait. He would watch it from cover and if Dick or any of his men attempted to recapture the girl he would pick them off from ambush. He stood watch patiently for two hours and the forest failed to give forth any of the enemy. Leaving his hiding-place he made a complete circuit of the cabin, always keeping within easy striking distance. He found no signs and returned to the knoll just as young Henry emerged from the woods leading the horse.

Arranging a bear-skin for a saddle Crockett lifted the girl on to it and picked

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up Old Betsy, and lost no time in taking the spotted trail for the trading-post. After a mile of slow travel he halted and said:

"You're a horsewoman. I don't need to lead this nag. See them blazed trees ahead? That's the trail we're following. Can you whistle?"

She pursed her red lips and with boyish ease imitated some bird-notes.

"Mighty fine whistling," he approved. "You oughter been a boy—beggin' Jim Macon's pardon. Now you follow the blazed trees, keeping them on your left. If at times you lose them just rein in and whistle."

"But you're not going to leave me?" she cried in alarm.

"No, but I mustn't kill time by walking at the head of this nag when your dad and Jim Macon are nearly crazy along of not seeing you. I'll be near all the time, maybe on one side, maybe on t'other, perhaps behind. If you hear or see anything that fusses you just sound one of them bird-calls, and I'll answer." And he paused and cunningly imitated her performance in whistling. "The idee is for you to ride as fast as you can without losing the trees. Don't be afraid of losing me. I'm the poor the Bible speaks of; I'm always with you. And just remember that Old Betsy and me are between you and any danger. Now see how fast you can pick up the trail."

Under this arrangement they made much better time, the girl urging her mount to keep up the pace as fast as she could sight a blaze ahead. Crockett also was afforded an opportunity of standing guard. Sometimes she glimpsed him on the left, then on the right, and sometimes behind her. A great peacefulness came over her as she marveled at his ubiquitous maneuvering. His flitting presence spelled security; it was like the blade of a master at fence always encircling her with protection. The shadow of fear vanished and she no longer found the forest ominous. Her heart sang as she looked ahead to the meeting with her father and Jim.

At midday Crockett reappeared beside the trail and handed her a parcel containing meat. Fashioning a cup from leaves he brought her water from a hidden spring. After she had finished eating he encouraged:

"We're more'n half-way there. Keep the nag up to the work."

"Half-way to Jackson?" she cried in amazement.

"No; half-way to the new trading-post, where we can break the journey over-night and get fresh horses. Probably your dad won't be there, but probably some one else will be."

"Jim?" she whispered, her face growing rosy.

"If he ain't he oughter go to a good horse-doctor and have his head examined."

Late in the afternoon they entered the opening surrounding the post. Skow, seated in the doorway, shaded his eyes and stared incredulously; then called out loudly, and ran toward them. Crockett gave a huzza. Macon, Judge Curtes and Melver piled out from the cabin. Bringing up the rear came Brink. Crockett turned aside and shook hands with the men and engaged them in conversation while father and lover took turns in greeting Tillie.

"Judge just arrived from Jackson. Wouldn't stay there," explained Brink. "Said it come over him all at once that he must return here. We got Macon started for Jackson on the horse-litter, but when he came to his senses he rolled off and refused to go on. Thank heavens, he seems to be all right now, although at the first he got away and went mooning toward the Mississippi. We got him back, badly beat out. Skow, Melver and me chased a warm trail to the Obion, but arrived too late to find anything."

"Did the judge get any word from the gang?" Crockett inquired.

"No. Queer, too. I guess it was because you were so hot on their trail they didn't have time to stop to dicker. But good heavens, man! Tell us about it!"

"I'll swell up and bust if you don't begin at once," added Skow.

"In a minute, when I can tell it to all. I 'low they're about done swapping her back and forth," said Crockett, turning to grin at the happy trio.

Judge Curtes rushed for Crockett, and the hunter at first feared he was to be kissed.

"Colonel Crockett, I'm eternally indebted to you," declared the judge, tearfully. "You have restored to me what is infinitely more precious than all else the world holds. Words are useless."

By this time young Macon, still wearing a bloody bandage 'round his shapely head,

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had Crockett's hands and was pumping them frantically, unable to speak, leaving it for Brink, as the family friend, to present Skow and the bashful Melver to Miss Tillie.

"If you want to do me a real favor—" Crockett began.

"Name it! Anything within my power!" exclaimed the judge.

"Take all I have!" brokenly pleaded Macon.

"I was going to orate that all I ask is that we licker and eat," mildly replied Crockett.

In their ecstatic happiness this response became a supreme witticism, and was welcomed with hysterical outbursts. The hunter leaped clear of their caressing hands, and sought safety behind Brink, who was talking with Tillie.

"Every one's crazy, and happy," he cried. "Let's go inside."

"We must have your story," insisted Brink. "If Potter Dick isn't dead we must know how we stand."

The girl paled and murmured—

"There's always danger while he lives."

"None to you," the hunter promptly assured. Then to the men, "All inside and hear the yarn. With the cup of the creature handy to soften my speaking machin'ry I can talk fast enough. Dick ain't dead yet, worse luck; but he's lost two promising members of his gang by my hand; and I'll do better after I've had more practice."

The colonel exhausted his narrative while eating and drinking. There followed many questions, and night came before he had satisfied their curiosity. At last he called a halt, and said:

"We must start in a body early tomorrow morning. All of us will go with the judge and Miss Tillie. Once they're in Jackson they can plan to go visiting in the eastern part of the State, where they can stick till Potter Dick's been gathered home."

This point was being discussed when Brink sprang to his feet and snatched up a rifle, warning:

"Some one comes. Look to the windows."

"It can't be an attack in force," scoffed Crockett, taking Old Betsy and slipping to the door.

"Don't shoot! It's Coombs," a voice called from the darkness.

"Then come ahead and show yourself," Crockett invited.

COOMBS rode up to the door and flung himself from the saddle and entered the cabin. Stepping to the table he fished something from a pocket and informed:

"Got a writin' for the jedge. Man gave it to me at Jackson. Strange cuss to me. Jest bobbed up afore me and said he had a written word for Jedge Curtes an' that it was mighty 'portant, being about his gal. Good Lawd! If there ain't Miss Tillie in the flesh an' blood. Wal, dog-gone my cats——"

"Never mind that. The message, man! The message!" peremptorily demanded Brink.

Still blinking in amazement Coombs handed the paper over to Judge Curtes. The judge shifted the bottle holding the candle to a cross-beam back of the table, and standing erect examined the paper. His face grew haggard and his voice trembled as he read aloud:

" 'You've got your girl back. But if you don't call off your society, or if you make a move to find us, she'll be taken again.' "

Tillie gave a little cry of fear and crept close to Macon. The men heard the warning in silence. The judge breathed heavily, and when he could master his voice he muttered:

"That shows they're still on my track. —— them! Tillie must be placed where she will be absolutely safe."

"As my wife she will be perfectly safe!" cried young Macon.

"I think Crockett's advice about going to the eastern part of the State is best," spoke up Brink, taking the message and frowning as he read it.

"To me it sounds like a bluff from some one that know'd his gun ain't loaded," commented Crockett. "Judge, you get that girl over into Virginy, or the Carolinas and place her in good care. Then you come back here and start your campaign for Congress, telling every one you're going to wipe out that gang. Do that and you'll go to Washington a-fluking. I'll go with you and the girl as far as Jackson, farther if need be. Then I'll start in 'lectioneering, and we'll give them skunks the greatest fight they ever stubbed their toes against. Bears and painters! Never was a better war-cry. Why, no matter how much a voter might like t'other fellow that's running against you he's simply got to

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vote for the man that's hooting defiance to the outlaws. Hurrah, Judge! You've got your girl back, and Potter Dick will send you to Congress, and we'll send him to hell!"

"A campaign on those lines would put the country solidly behind you," Brink agreed.

"But such a campaign must make good against Dick," warned Skow. "He must be run down. For he has a long memory, and when the judge comes back from Washington the gang will lay for him."

"Of course the campaign promises must be made good," cried Crockett with great enthusiasm. "For once a candidate can keep his word without treading on any decent man's toes."

Young Macon slipped an arm 'round the girl's slim waist, and urged:

"Once Tillie is my wife I can throw a bodyguard 'round her that will make her perfectly safe. And by the time you've finished your term, Judge, there won't be any Potter Dick."

"But how about you, Jim?" faintly queried the girl. "Do you think I would live surrounded by guards while you were riding everywhere, with a murderer perhaps hiding behind every bush and tree?"

"I 'low you young folks better go visiting for a year, or so, till we've cleaned things up a bit," suggested Crockett.

"I'll never turn my back on that cowardly gang!" passionately retorted Macon.

"That's the proper spirit," Brink gruffly indorsed. "You'd only be defending your own. If a man isn't a coward he must speak as you have spoken, Macon. Of course the judge has the choice of two decisions."

"And he has made his choice," wearily said the judge, throwing himself down on a stool at the table and tearing a leaf from a note-book, and writing rapidly. Finishing, he rose and said, "Coombs, ride back to Jackson. Kill your horse if necessary and I'll make it good many times. Deliver this message to the secretary of the Jackson Defense Society. Start at once. If your horse gives out, go on afoot. A hundred dollars to you when I get home."

And pressing the message into Coombs' hand he pushed him through the door and stood and watched him mount his horse and ride into the night.

Then with shoulders braced and head held high he turned back to the silent, expectant group, and with his old dignity informed:

"Gentlemen, I owe a duty to my daughter which takes precedence over ambition. I have, as president of the Jackson Defense Society, sent notice to the secretary that the society is herewith disbanded, and that I shall no longer bestir myself in running down Potter Dick and his infamous gang. Let the world think what it will, attribute what craven qualities of soul to me it will, I am determined to end this soul-wracking fear. As my friend Brink has said, there are paid officials, whose duty it is to protect the State. If the people will accept my candidacy without imposing on me the task of acting as a public avenger, well and good."

"No, sir!" Crockett sternly cried, smiting his fist on the table. "Your duty as a citizen of Tennessee over-rides all else. As a judge it is your duty to sentence a man, once he is convicted of a crime. You could not remain on the bench if you gave him his freedom because some of his partners had threatened to steal your daughter. I now give you notice I pull back my offer to help in your campaign."

"If you've pledged your word—" Brink began.

"When Davie Crockett gives his word it's always with the spoken condition that there shall be no backing and filling."

"Colonel Crockett is keeping the letter and spirit of his promise," the judge said with a deep sigh. "He consented to help me, providing I would make every effort to run down the Dick gang. He is entirely within his rights in refusing to aid me."

"Well, well, Judge. There are others who, perhaps, can fill the colonel's place," Brink bruskly observed.

"But I ain't quite through yet," Crockett spoke up. "So far as I'm concerned I figger the judge is out of the race. That let's me into the running. And right here and now I put myself on record as being a candidate for Congress. I shall begin work just as soon as this little girl has been took to a place where she'll be safe."

For a minute there was silence; then came young Macon's low-voiced inquiry—

"And on what platform will you run, Colonel Crockett?"

With another thump of his fist on the table Crockett fairly shouted—

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"The simplest, shortest, sweetest, and most easily understood platform ever given out in old Tennessee—'Death to Potter Dick'!"

CHAPTER X

THE TRAIL OF INK

THE morning found Judge Curtes thoroughly restored to his wonted dignity, his decision the night before bringing him, apparently, much peace of mind. After breakfast he led Crockett aside and heartily shook his hand, and told him:

"I shall never forget the service you did me. I highly respect your views in regard to my new attitude toward the problem of hunting down the outlaws. But in that matter I must follow my own best judgment. During the night I have examined my heart and find my love for my daughter has influenced me tremendously. In that respect I believe I am only human. And I am forced to the conviction that the people will understand my position and will not hold it against me, even though I leave it to paid officials to exterminate the Dick band. Other candidates have not sought votes by promising any such reforms. I scarcely see why it becomes my duty to do so. In short, Colonel, I feel I owe it to my friends to stand for Congress even if it be my misfortune to run against you."

"Judge, you could 'a' said all that in mighty few words and I wouldn't been a bit mad," smiled Crockett.

"I wanted to say it to you as I have. And I wish to add this; if I win—and I believe I shall—I will not stand for reelection, but shall step aside next time for you."

"Bless your heart, man! You have a perfect right to run for Congress. The same right that I have. If you'd said you were going to fight those whelps to the end I'd have stuck by you. But that's all ended. Good luck to the winner! Now how do you figger the news from Natchez got to you almost before I arrived with Miss Tillie?"

"Doubtless one of the band caught a fast boat to Memphis and rode post-haste over the old Indian trail to Jackson."

"I 'low that's how it was worked," Crockett agreed. "That would give them plenty of time. Has Miss Tillie told you—any particulars?"

The judge lifted his brows and threw out his hands helplessly.

"Only enough to befuddle me. It seems some one rescued her on Pirate Island; some one she trusts implicitly. It would appear that that person stands in such fear of Potter Dick he caused her to swear never to reveal his identity until it is positively known that Dick is dead. Coming from any one but Tillie it would sound remarkable. And yet, I can appreciate how a man might hesitate to draw the malignant attention of the Dick gang to him. Like myself, maybe, he has those whom he loves better than life."

"Unless he loves a fight he's acting mighty wise," Crockett conceded.

The judge smiled and confided:

"Young Jim Macon is jealous as a hound pup when you pat the cat. Tried to make Tillie tell him, and they quarreled. That is, they would have quarreled if he hadn't crawled. He'll never rest easy until he knows who the fellow is."

"Jim'll be getting mad at me next," grinned Crockett. Then soberly, "Would you mind if I looked at the message you got last night?"

"Not at all; that is, if you can find it in the fireplace. I threw it in there last night."

This closed their conversation as Crockett was curious to study the note. He kneeled before the fireplace and found only ashes. The judge, observing the negative results of his search, murmured:

"I wish you had spoken of it before breakfast. Then you would have found it, rumpled and twisted, but still intact."

"When do you start for Jackson?"

The judge coughed and appeared a bit confused; then frankly stated—

"Colonel, I want you to take this right, as I owe more to you than to all other men on earth; but I'd prefer you didn't ride to Jackson with me."

The hunter pursed his lips, waited a moment, and then prompted—

"Well?"

Much embarrassed, yet meeting his gaze squarely the judge continued:

"My friends here are a sufficient protection. They will escort Tillie and me back to town. Doubtless we shall meet Coombs and a posse when we set forth. The word that Tillie has been rescued will surely bring my friends riding here. That assures her safety. Now should you ride with us

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my enemies might say that I had to be guarded by the very man I'm trying to beat for Congress. It would also look as if Jim Macon wasn't able to protect the young woman he is to marry. I—I've put it baldly, wretchedly. I——"

"Not another word, Judge. I was simple-minded not to see it that way. Of course I was thinking only of your girl. But as you say she is safe without me. And, of course, I'd never use any such stuff in 'lectioneering against you. But fools might, and Jim might be sensitive. We'll call it a go as it is and I'll shove back to my cabin and return neighbor Owens' horse."

The hunter noticed that Macon was worried and uneasy since breakfast, and was continually casting appealing glances at Tillie. The girl, now refreshed and confident, was superb in her ignoring of the young planter. An atmosphere of aloofness repelled the young man whenever he ventured to approach her; all of which amused Crockett deeply.

"Think of a little yaller-haired squirrel like that raising hob with a man of Macon's temper," he chuckled as he filled a jug and collected his traps together.

Brink approached and seated himself on a stool and inquired—

"Are you determined to run against the judge, Colonel?"

"I've got to."

"If you knew that by waiting you could surely go to Congress, that the land syndicate I represent would work for you, that the judge and Macon would work for you and make your election a sure thing—I say, would that knowledge influence you to reconsider?"

"Not an inch. The judge is a good man, according to his lights. But we need men in Congress who have guts as well as goodness. The judge quits trailing Potter Dick and his crowd because he wants to be good to his daughter—a lovely little girl. But there is a bigger goodness—goodness to all men's daughters. If he would keep after Dick and his gang of cutthroats he would pester them into a corner and be among the first to run them to earth. By doing that he'd make this a safe neck of the woods for every man's daughter that might be living here. He's promised to keep hands off on account of one girl—his only daughter.

"I know it's putting him in a tight corner; yet a man should defend his own without making terms with the devil. If all men did that way this wouldn't be Tennessee; it would be hell. Knowing his mind as we do let's s'pose Potter Dick is caught and brought before him for trial. Let's s'pose Dick's friends tell the judge he must see to it that the prisoner escapes, or his girl will be killed. What then? Would he slip the collar off Dick and let him go to save the girl; or would he stand up to the lick-log and forever wipe out a menace to my daughters and my neighbors' daughters? I'm afraid he's human enough to weaken."

"The situation you suggest could never come about," Brink shortly replied.

"But if the weakness is there in his mind what would happen in Congress? In Congress there wouldn't be a question of letting a murderer go, nor could his girl's life be weighed in any balance. But let's say a bad bill comes up, not one that smells all over the country, but one that's getting over-ripe without many knowing it. Say he knows, from handling it and sniffing at it with his legal nose, that it's fly-blown, and no good. Say he also knows if he fights it some one is going to kill—not his daughter, but a pet ambition of his. Would he weaken then?"

"Never!" Brink warmly declared.

"I'm afraid he would. I like him, but I must run against him."

"I appreciate how you feel, Colonel, but you will be beaten. Congress is beyond you—just now."

"Probably; but I'll keep on running, as old Johnson said when the bear invited him to stop and talk it over."

Shortly after this conversation Crockett secured the horse, thrust an arm through the bridle, slung his rifle over his shoulder and, jug in hand, called out a general "good-by" and made to depart. Skow and Mason were surprized and asked if he wasn't to be of the judge's escort. Without alluding to the judge's reasons for his not accompanying the party he briefly explained that his help would not be needed and that he was impatient to return to his cabin and set out to join his family.

The men crowded about him and earnestly shook his hand. Young Macon begged of him to bring his family and spend many days on the plantation. It was obvious that his going took them all by surprize with the exception of the judge.

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He supposed he was to depart without bidding farewell to the girl except as he included her in a general salutation. As he turned his back on the post, however, she flew after him and threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. Making a great pretense of being helpless he cried for assistance; but she would not permit him to dismiss her so lightly.

"You're a man, Colonel Crockett, and I love you. I want you to bring Mrs. Crockett and the children to visit me in Jackson. When I stop to think of all you've done for me——"

She paused to wink back some tears.

Carefully depositing the jug on the ground he patted her yellow hair, and advised:

"Better pay me back by being good to Jim Macon. Mighty nice chap, that Jim. He was hurt by a bullet while trying to find you. You oughter be awful good to him."

"I'm better to him than he deserves," she defended. "He's angry with me because I won't break my promise and tell who rescued me before you came along. I'd love him awfully if he wasn't so silly."

"Well, my dear; it's worth something to have a man love you so much that he can't help acting silly. Go visiting. Have a good time. Marry Jim, and be very happy. Good-by!"

CROCKETT tried riding the horse and gave it up because the jug was an inconvenience. He had followed the blazed trail scarcely more than a mile when he heard a voice shouting his name. He halted and located it behind him. Placing the jug behind a tree he threw the reins over a low bush and taking his rifle warily turned back. Soon there came a heavy crashing that eliminated any suspicion of treachery.

"This way! What's wanted?" he impatiently called out.

It was Melver, and his heavy breathing showed he had been running hard. Sighting Crockett he leaned limply against a tree and fanned himself with his hat.

"Are you, too, running for Congress?" demanded Crockett.

"It's Miss Tillie!" panted Melver. "Gone again!"

"Damnation!" howled Crockett. "Not stolen?"

"Yep: right out from under our eyes! Judge and Macon 'bout insane. Macon was shot through the wrist, right hand helpless. Oh, ——'s to pay for certain, Colonel! Judge sent me to fetch you back. Reckon here's a mighty fine chance for you to do some campaignin' for Congress."

"I won't wait for you as you're tuckered out. The jug is behind one of the trees near the horse. Bring the nag back with you, but don't ride him if you're in a hurry."

And Crockett ran like a deer-hound for the cabin.

As he burst into the clearing there was but one figure in sight, that of the judge. He sat huddled up on the end of a log, staring intently at something he held in his hand. The others had scattered in search of the girl, apparently.

"Quick! What does this mean?" cried the hunter, shaking the judge by the shoulder to gain his attention.

The judge raised eyes that were blinded with tears, and held up a piece of paper and a knot of ribbon.

"Jim found these—where the devils caught her," he choked. "A ribbon from her hair. The paper was tied to it."

Crockett snatched the paper and read:

Last call. Bring thirty thousand dollars in gold to the trading-post within five days. I will know when it arrives and will tell you what to do next. If you fail you will not see your daughter again. This is your last chance.—POTTER DICK.

It required some effort for Crockett to spell out the words but the first glance told him it was written by the person who penned the note found in the flatboat, and who made the entries on the death-record found in the cave.

"How did it happen?" the hunter demanded.

"We were getting ready to go. She was in high spirits for having made up some childish quarrel with Jim. She was pretending to run away from him. He was pursuing her. She darted into the woods to hide. She was gone some minutes with him looking for her. To all the rest of us it was only a game. Then a shot rang out, and Jim cried he was shot, and Tillie screamed. We ran to find her and came upon him with a hole through his right wrist. Brink tied his arm up and we pushed on. It was Jim who found the ribbon and paper. We failed to get a trace of her, and I sent Melver after you."

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"You must be a herd of idiots," Crockett stormed. "You let them steal her right out from under your nose. And you didn't need my help in getting her to Jackson!" And he groaned and swore in his anger. "But it settles matters for me. I won't ever run for Congress until after I've run down and bagged Potter Dick. You stay here where we can find you."

With that he darted into the woods.

He soon encountered Brink, who hurried him to the spot where the message and ribbon had been found. Skow joined them, saying that Macon persisted in taking part in the search although badly wounded.

Brink pleaded:

"It's lucky Melver overtook you. Help us find the girl this once, Colonel, and I'll work for your election."

"I ain't finding young women for the sake of getting to Congress," Crockett grimly informed. "What riles me is the way this low-down Dick makes fools of you folks. The whole flock of you don't seem to have brains enough to outfit a persimmon. What the devil did you let her get a foot out of sight for?"

"It was her game with Macon," Brink groaned. "He'd been peevish because she refused to tell him who rescued her. After she said good-by to you she made up to him, and I guess they both was so happy to have brushed their misunderstanding aside that they forgot—that we all forgot—there could be any danger. But, good heavens! Who would have believed that fiend could strike again and so soon?"

"Too much talking. Too little being done," Crockett snapped, ducking aside and casting about for a trail.

The immediate vicinity of the spot where the girl presumably was captured was much trampled by the feet of her would-be rescuers; and it was not until the hunter made a wide circuit that he found a sign—the impress of a small boot—in the forest mold back of the cabin. It was evident from this one track that the kidnapers were boldly taking her through the break in the ridge toward Jackson.

Off to the west he heard Macon raging and shouting her name, and he knew the pursuit had been in the wrong direction entirely. By this time he had lost Skow and Brink and was glad to be working alone. Taking it for granted the kidnapers had horses near he raced to the break in the ridge before making any intimate examination of the forest floor. He found the marks of one horse, but the animal ridden by Coombs would account for these. Of other signs he found none."

"In a —— circle again," he ruefully cursed. "The whole gang chased me up the river from Natchez. They quit their boat at Memphis and plugged through the Indian trail horseback. Well, maybe they kept their nags farther down the trail."

To test this possibility he passed beyond the ridge and followed the Jackson path for more than a mile. He found no signs of horses except those left by Coombs' horse in coming and going. Convinced the gang would never attempt, while afoot, to carry the girl any greater distance than he had covered he endeavored to prove his deductions by striking from the trail and minutely examining the forest floor in a line due north. In this fashion he searched for half a mile, then doubled back and repeated the experiment for a like distance south of the trail.

"That settles it!" he gritted as he returned to the trail after scoring another failure. "They started with her toward Jackson, but they never got this far. There can be only one explanation: they've got a hiding-place close to the cabin and it took only a few minutes to drag her in there. It's probably the same place they was holding her in when she got away in the night and let out that yell we heard in the cabin. They reckon on laying low until it's safe to fetch up horses. It don't seem reasonable that they can be hiding right under our noses, but that's the very caper they're cutting up. Now for some fine combing!"

He methodically marked off the forest into imaginary squares for a depth of nearly half a mile on the south side of the trail, and undertook to search each of these areas most painstakingly. By sundown he had finished the south side of the trail and was forced to admit that thus far he was defeated. As he reluctantly returned to the post his respect for Potter Dick's cunning was measurably increased.

He arrived at the cabin just as Macon dragged himself in, torn and scratched by briars, his bloody right hand carried in a sling, his left hand straining over the butt of a pistol. Skow came in from the north and reported no clues. Brink had arrived ahead of the hunter, and Melver was still

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out. A comparison of notes showed they had penetrated the surrounding forest for fully a half a mile in all directions. Crockett then demonstrated by elimination that his theory must be correct and they must confine their efforts to a small area back of the cabin.

"But you've already been over the ground between here and the ridge," reminded Brink. "If your nose can't find the hiding-place how are we poor devils to succeed?"

CROCKETT wearily slung his belt aside and explained:

"I've scouted south of the trail as careful as I know how. When I struck in north it was just to go through the fringe of timber between here and the ridge, looking for a trail, not for a hiding-place. I'll swear there's nothing south of the trail. It must then, be north. It's somewhere in the stretch I covered on the run."

"I was in that timber, too," said Skow. "I went north from here and in doubling back took a line that led between the cabin and the ridge. Don't seem to be enough cover there for a hiding-place. So many rocks the growth is thin and stunted."

"Your eyes are scarcely Colonel Crockett's eyes," Brink snapped. "When next we go out we'll be under your orders, Colonel."

"I'm going out right now," Macon faintly announced.

"You're going to have that wrist looked at and stay right here," corrected Crockett.

"Never say die, Jim. We'll hunt if we can see, and hunt as long as we can pull a leg," said Skow.

"There's no use trying to hunt them out now the sun's gone," Crockett spoke up. "Rest your bones. I'll scout 'round tonight and make sure they don't fetch up horses, or slip her out to where they may have horses waiting. With daylight we'll do some real hunting."

"I'll never leave this spot alive without Tillie," Judge Curtes announced. "Before we do anything else I want to write an order for money and send it to Jackson. I may have to ask you to accommodate me, Brink, old friend. I can raise twenty thousand. My note——

"Say no more, Judge," Brink broke in. "Write your order and I'll make up what you lack."

"Never!" cried young Macon, his face a white mask. "It's up to the judge and me. I'll make up any deficit."

"Well, well, it makes no difference so long as we get the money," growled Brink.

"Where's Melver? I want to send the order by him," said the judge.

"Probably stayed to get acquainted with my jug," Crockett morosely remarked.

Judge Curtes produced paper and found the trader's quill and horn of ink and took a position at the table under the light of the candle on the beam. He wrote steadily for several minutes, then rose and walked out into the dusk to give his paper to Melver.

"He'll get lost or gobbled up by the outlaws," Brink growled, rising and following him.

Macon took the stool vacated by the judge and attempted to write with his left hand. After a few awkward trials he barked out an oath and threw down the quill, and requested:

"Colonel, please write this for me. I'll dictate it, and after you've finished I'll try to scrawl my name."

Crockett ruefully replied:

"I'd love to, Jim. But if I did no one could make much out of it. When I was justice of the peace at Shoals Crick I got so I could sign my name and make a few marks in the big book the law said I must keep. I had one deputy that could guess what my writing meant, and when he moved to Alabama I resigned the job."

"Let me do it for you," briskly offered Skow.

Macon dictated an order to his attorney in Jackson, explaining the situation and placing great stress on the imperative necessity of receiving ten thousand dollars at once. Skow followed the dictation rapidly and dried the writing with hot ashes from the fireplace. Macon skimmed through the paper, nodded his thanks, and laboriously scrawled his signature. Then throwing the order on the table he rose, and said—

"Give it to the judge to send with his if I'm not here."

"But where are you going?" demanded Skow, jumping to his feet.

"I'm going into the woods and I'll not come back till I've found some trace of Tillie," Macon fiercely cried as he lunged through the door into the gathering darkness.

"The mad fool!" cried Skow, starting for

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the door, but halting as he heard Brink and the judge calling out to some one.

Crockett stood by the table, waiting to learn if the two men outside had halted Macon. By accident he deflected his gaze and observed a few words of the written order. His eyes flew open, then closed to slits.

"What's the row, Skow?" he asked, fumbling in his hunting shirt and fishing out the message he had picked up in the boat, also the last one received by Judge Curtes.

"I think it's Melver returning. I thought at first they was stopping Macon. S'pose some one ought to go after him."

Crockett smoothed out the two messages and placed them on the table beside Macon's dictated order. The three bits of writing were penned by the same hand. They were as familiar to him as were Skow's features. Heavy and precise, the script bespoke a methodical mind, the mind of a man who keeps careful accounts and casts up a balance that answers for every penny received or paid out. Beyond a shadow of a doubt Skow had written the record in the cave on Wild Turkey Creek. And as Crockett realized this his dark eyes flickered like heat-lightning in the heart of a thunder cloud, and he recalled the entry wherein one poor devil was murdered for less than ten dollars. A wolfish smile slowly distorted his lips.

"Now I get it!" cried Skow, turning toward the hunter. "Melver is coming and crying out that he saw Hogan in the woods and that Hogan fired at him! I reckon we've about come to a show-down."

"Never righter in your life, Skow," calmly agreed Crockett. "We've come to the biggest show-down ever seen in Tennessee!"

CHAPTER XI

EUREKA!

THERE was metal in Crockett's voice. Skow glanced back at him but saw nothing unusual in the pose of the hunter. Crockett was standing with finger-tips resting on the table, the light from the candle behind him bringing out the luster of his long, dark hair as he bowed his head, seemingly lost in deep thought. Skow's gaze was almost incurious until he noted the frown and the peculiar concentration of the eyes. He suddenly discovered there was an atmosphere of tensity about the man.

"What's the matter with you, Colonel? Sick?"

"Yes, sick as a dog," muttered Crockett, his teeth clicking over the words, and with a shivering intake of the breath like one ill with ague. "Sicker'n a dog," he continued, his voice dropping to the timbre of an Indian war-drum muffled by the deep forest. "Skow, come here."

The trader approached the table, eying him furtively.

"Do you know what 'Skow' means down Shoal Crick way?" asked Crockett without lifting his head.

The trader laughed uneasily, wondering if the hunter was light-headed from liquor, and asked—

"Well, what does it mean, Colonel?"

"When a blacksmith tries to make something and can't and sees he's wasting his iron he takes it, red-hot, and throws it into a tub of water, where it sings out *skow!* and the smith says, 'That's all you're good for, just a *skow*.' You wrote this paper for Macon?"

"You know I did. What of it? Didn't he ask me to do it? How does it concern you, anyway?" Skow growled, his broad face flushing.

"It was neighborly of you to oblige him," Crockett continued. "But the hand that wrote this paper also wrote the demand for thirty thousand dollars that Judge Curtes received——"

"You lie!" roared Skow.

Imperturbably Crockett kept on—

"And wrote the note that said, 'Macon didn't go. Coming your way.'"

"Are you drunk or crazy?" gasped Skow, his hands closing convulsively.

In the same monotone the hunter added:

"And wrote the record of the poor devils dismissed, the record I found in the cave on Wild Turkey Crick. And here are two of the papers I've mentioned that prove the fact."

With that he slipped Macon's order aside and revealed the two messages he had kept covered up for the moment.

Skow leaped upon him with the ferocity of a panther, grunting—

"You know too —— much!"

"Enough to hang you—you Skow!" gritted Crockett.

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They clinched and struggled in silence, scarcely moving from their tracks once they had grappled. Crockett knew Skow did not wish to attract attention for fear the hunter would denounce him. For his part Crockett desired no intrusion lest another member of the gang be among those arriving on the scene. He could no longer doubt but that some of Potter Dick's men were close at hand and were in constant communication with the trader.

The mystery of the girl's disappearance was beautifully simple to him now. The trading-post was one of Dick's junction-points. Here plunder and stolen slaves were brought and concealed until it was safe to pass them on down, or up, the river. The boatmen from the Obion formed the connecting link with the Mississippi. Now he knew why the body of Macon's Bull had been shifted from the creek to the crevice caused by the earthquake: it was too close to the post to remain above-ground.

The two tested each other's strength without venturing on any radical initiative. Skow had sought to seize the hunter by the throat, and from this Crockett deduced he was unarmed. Crockett's weapons were in his discarded belt. As they pushed and pulled and warily experimented with each other's physical resources the hunter made two discoveries: Skow was a tremendously strong man and possessing much skill as a wrestler, plus the tricks that permit a man to slay with the naked hands; he was intent on shifting the struggle to the other side of the table.

Maneuvering with seeming clumsiness Crockett permitted himself to be swept off his feet for an instant, and when he regained his footing he had won an important objective. He had gained the end of the table and had reversed his position so as to be facing it. Skow struggled desperately to whirl him about until his back should be toward the table, but Crockett had wrestled his way the full length of the border and had nothing to learn in rough and ready tricks.

His immediate desire was to learn his opponent's eagerness in gaining the other side of the table. To learn the reason he marked time, digging his chin into the trader's shoulder, his arms in a bear's embrace about the body, sagging down his weight and making an anchor of his feet. The table contained nothing but Macon's order, the two messages, the quill, and the horn of ink. And yet the far side of the table was Skow's goal.

"We were at the head, on this side, but he wanted to go 'round it," Crockett told himself.

Skow tried to bite him in the neck.

"You —— wolf," Crockett snarled, butting his head into the desperado's face. "Wanted to go 'round it."

And he flashed a glance at the walls back of the table but could see no weapons.

Suddenly pretending to make a misstep he decoyed his man into making a violent break, and in the ensuing mêlée landed beyond the end of the table; and Crockett understood. Hanging through a loop on the table-leg was the long, keen knife used in slicing venison.

Skow summoned all the strength in his powerful body and with a heave and a grunt lifted Crockett off the floor and staggered against the table and pushed the hunter backward. With a suddenness that was disconcerting Crockett threw himself back on the heavy planks and darted out his left hand below the edge of the table and secured the knife. The table was wide and massively built and would not tip, nor give way. Lying on his back the hunter thrust his right arm across his opponent's chest and endeavored to sweep him aside. As he attempted this Skow sought to secure a death-grip on the throat with his left hand, while the right went after the knife. Crockett hugged in his chin and extended his right hand outward and upward, ready to strike.

Skow felt himself responding to the mighty pressure of the iron arm. Fight as he would he could not bear it down and come breast to breast with his antagonist. He clawed ineffectively to work his fingers beneath the hugged-in chin, and strained to secure a purchase on the knife-hand, and only succeeded in grasping the upper arm.

"Help!" he panted, as his chest began rising and his grasp on the arm began slipping.

A man carrying a rifle leaped through the doorway, and stared in astonishment at the combatants.

At last the newcomer sensed the meaning of the scene, and yelped:

"Jump back, George! I've got him!"

"Melver!" mumbled Crockett.

"Come here! Shoot him!" frantically

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roared Skow, feeling Crockett's hand gathering up the front of his stout homespun shirt.

Melver advanced a step, then hesitated, a mighty fear of the hunter shaking his nerve.

"You fool! He knows all!" panted Skow.

"I'll nail him the second ye jump clear!" cried Melver, trying to draw a bead on the hunter and balked by the intervening figure of the trader.

Crockett sensed Skow's next move, a last desperate effort to break loose, and he tightened the grip on the shirt and thanked God homespun was stout material. The grasp on his left arm lessened a bit, and with a nimble movement of his fingers he juggled the knife and held it by the tip. At the same movement Skow gave a yell and lunged backward.

Clinging to the stout shirt Crockett was jerked to a sitting posture on the edge of the table, his left arm free for the moment, and with a flirt of the hand he hurled the knife at Melver and threw Skow from him. Skow dropped on his back. Melver gave a howl of pain as the knife stuck in his shoulder, fired and missed.

Skow snarled a blasphemy and sprang erect. Crockett dropped to his knees and flung himself under the table. The two men rushed forward, but the hunter rose, up-ending the table and interposing its stout planks between them and him. Outside and from a distance came the voices of the judge and Brink, excitedly demanding to know what was the matter. From the increasing volume of the voices the hunter knew they were coming on the run to investigate.

"Kill him before they get here!" puffed Skow, catching up a stool and madly trying to batter Crockett over the head, but unable to reach him because of the height of the barrier. "Get a knife, a pistol! you idiot! The knife he threw at you! I'll hold him!"

And with a terrific rush he swept the table back until the four legs encountered the wall.

WITH a yelp of triumph Melver snatched from the floor the knife Crockett had driven into his shoulder, and darted to one side of the table to slay the penned-in victim. Skow's heavy stool guarded the other side of the table. Reaching above his head Crockett snatched down the bottle containing the candle, and holding it by the neck he leaped a foot from the floor and crashed it down on Skow's head, killing him instantly and plunging the room into darkness.

With a howl of terror Melver wheeled and jumped through the doorway. Pausing only to secure his belt from the opposite side of the room, Crockett sprang after him. Melver darted back of the cabin. Ignoring the outburst from the judge and Brink now arrived, Crockett took after Melver, locating him by the sound of his careless steps. As he pursued he heard the voice of Macon added to the exclamations of Brink and Judge Curtes.

"To think I lickered-up with them two varments!" groaned Crockett. "And hunted outlaws with them! And they was in need of killing all the time! And still, Davie Crockett, you was idiot enough to 'low you had brains enough to go to Congress!"

He laid aside his blind rage as the instincts of the hunter took command of him. He was entering the narrow strip of scattered growth between the cabin and the rocky ridge. When the first branch brushed his face he forgot the three men behind and became an Indian in cunning. He had heard Melver crashing through the grove with no pretense of concealment.

"One of two things, or my name ain't Crockett," the man from the cane decided. "He's either gone plumb crazy, or else he knows a good place to hide in. I 'low it's the last. The hiding-place of the gang that Skow was kindly going to help me find in the morning." And he smiled grimly. "Well, if Melver leads me to it I shall feel mighty thankful the knife didn't land in his gullet, as it certainly would have if I'd thrown it with my right hand."

He soon came to the foot of the ridge and stumbled among the rocks washed down from some precipitous face. The top he recalled, was fringed with timber, with the broken surface denuded of vegetation. It would be impossible for Melver to scale the ragged wall without betraying himself at every step. The hunter halted and cocked his head. There was no sound except as he caught the murmur of voices back of the cabin. To the north the woods extended only a short distance before ending at the clearing. To the south one

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could keep under cover until reaching the break through the ridge.

"He hasn't gone up the rocks. He wouldn't turn north as that would take him out into the open, and by'n by there'll be a moon. Then he's hiding right here, among these rocks, or hustling to make the thick growth south of the Jackson trail. If he's hereabouts he'll stick for a spell and I can find him later."

He turned back from the ridge until clear of the débris and began feeling his way toward the Jackson trail, his moccasins falling with the Indian trick of testing each forward step before resting on the ground. He ranged back and forth in zig-zags until his feet warned him he was in a beaten path, the Jackson trail. He had heard no sound, and he did not believe Melver possessed the cunning to advance noiselessly.

"That narrows it down quite tolerable," he mused, glowing with satisfaction. "He never come down here. That leaves some hole in the rocks. All I've got to do is to lay low till daylight. He can't come out of his hole without me hearing him. At sunup I'll dig him out."

Silently returning to the point where he had turned at right-angles in making for the Jackson trail he settled himself to wait. Occasionally the faint sound of voices came to his ears from the direction of the cabin; and he smiled grimly as he pictured the consternation of the three men gathered there 'round Skow's dead body. Once Macon wandered to the edge of the timber back of the post and yelled for the hunter and Melver to come back and explain what the killing meant. Crockett remained silent and at last the planter gave it up and rejoined his friends.

Several hours passed and Crockett observed the darkness was thinning, and he knew the moon was rising. The scattered nature of the growth permitted the vague light to filter in until the hunter's keen vision began picking out natural objects. What had been inky blackness was now streaked with the outline of tree-trunks and shattered stems. A slight noise on his right stiffened his muscles. A few minutes passed and the sound was repeated, this time nearer. Some one had brushed against a low-hanging branch.

Gliding behind a clump of red cedars Crockett held his breath and waited. There was an object, a dozen feet away, that had not been there when he first gained the cedars. It resembled a six-foot section of a tree-trunk, left standing when the top was crashed to earth by wind or lightning. Yet his first inventory of the shadowy scene had not included it. Pulling his pistol he covered it. It was rigid and motionless, and for a moment he was almost inclined to believe himself in error. Then it shifted its position a few feet.

Crockett drew a bead and held the man at his mercy; but it was no thought of being merciful that stayed his trigger-finger. To shoot the man down would mean the elimination of another outlaw. But there remained the girl. He knew the silent figure must be Melver, emerged from hiding to reconnoiter. The man's precipitate flight had left him no time to choose a hiding-place. He was slow of wit; he would blindly obey instinct. That meant flight to the hiding-place he was most familiar with, or where the girl was now held a prisoner.

Restoring the pistol to his belt Crockett proceeded with his scheme to make Melver reveal the secret rendezvous. He felt about him, without removing his gaze from the outlaw, until his fingers closed on a dead branch. He fingered it and found it too long for his purpose. Trying again he found another, short and heavy and without twigs. Picking this up ever so gently he swung his arm back and made sure no boughs intervened, and then hurled the missile high and toward the cabin.

It landed with a staccato sound some twenty feet away. With a scruffling noise the figure turned back and vanished. Crockett stole from cover and pressed forward. Melver was nervous, else a poor woodsman, for he repeatedly betrayed the direction of his hurried retreat. The hunter had no difficulty in following him to a place at the foot of the ridge where several boulders, each as large as the trading-post, were heaped up grotesquely against the rocky wall. Clouds shut off the moonlight at the critical moment and Crockett did not behold the outlaw taking to cover. However, he considered the ruse to be thoroughly satisfactory. Somewhere among the giant boulders Melver was hiding. Then the girl and some of Dick's gang must be there.

"Holed-up, or I'm a liar!" he softly exulted.

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"And all the time we was scouting this neck of the woods for signs them varments have been in there, as snug as a bug in a bear-skin robe! No wonder they could nab the girl right from under the nose of her father and sweetheart! I 'low, Colonel Crockett, you'll camp right here till you've done the best piece of 'lectioneering that's been done in old Tennessee for a right smart spell."

The light was insufficient for him to detect any entrance among the rocks. In fact, Potter Dick's astuteness would lead one to expect the opening would be most cunningly masked even in broad daylight. Unless one were looking for the place he might pass by it repeatedly with never a suspicion.

Crockett would have been thoroughly contented with his good luck if not for the fear lest some of the men at the cabin resume their search and blunder upon him and unwittingly give the hidden outlaws the alarm. The hours passed, however, with no such intrusions; and with the first pink streaks of dawn Crockett rose in his covert and worked his limbs briskly until his circulation was restored to fighting pitch. Satisfied no stiffness remained in bones or muscles he drew his pistol and knife, and with the padded stealth of a tree-cat glided along the irregular base of the boulders.

At first sight the rocks presented a uniform front, a pyramid pile that sloped back against the living rock. There were crevices and holes in plenty, but none that held the hunter's interest. He had expected this; the gang would never use a place likely to be stumbled upon by a forest-rover.

Now he had it. The shoulder of one boulder projected by the face of another and left a passageway between the two. It was wide enough for a horse to enter, but it ended in a dead wall. Confident in his luck Crockett entered and a dozen short steps brought him to the wall and in front of another passage at right-angles. This ran into a black opening. He gazed triumphantly at this, the entrance to Potter Dick's secret retreat. He, alone of honest men, had found the open-sesame to all the blind mysteries of the past few days.

He took a step ahead and was confronted by the tall, angular form of Melver. The outlaw was armed with a rifle and was in the act of a prodigious yawn, accompanied by the wide stretching of his long arms, as he stepped into view. His open mouth remained open, but his sleepy eyes glared in terror as he discovered Crockett. Before he could collect his senses, or cry out, the hunter was upon him and had both hands on his throat. Choking and gurgling Melver went over backward; but in some fashion he managed to cock and discharge the rifle.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF THE TRAIL

AS CROCKETT threw the insensible outlaw from him another member of the gang appeared in the opening. It was Coombs. Resting on one knee the hunter covered him with his pistol, and ordered:

"Drop that gun! Take off that belt! Quick!"

Completely nonplussed by the hunter's appearance, Coombs obeyed. Crockett continued:

"Fasten Melver's feet together with your belt. Take off his belt, roll him over and fasten his hands. Now stand with your back to me, put your hands behind you."

Without a word Coombs did as told. Using the strap of his raccoon-skin pouch Crockett secured the prisoner's wrists. Then resting the muzzle of the pistol against the man's neck he demanded—

"How many inside?"

"Only the girl," faltered Coombs cringing under the touch of the cold metal.

Ready for any emergency the hunter seized the unconscious Melver by the neck of his shirt and prodded Coombs into motion. Coombs led the way into a recess under the pile of bolders. Through crevices at the top straggled the morning light. Dropping Melver the hunter ordered Coombs to sit down, and then took time to look about him. On a pile of robes at one side was something covered with a blanket. Darting to this he found the girl, bound and gagged. Her eyes, round with hysterical joy, filled with tears as she stared up into her deliverer's face.

"You poor younker!" he mumbled, removing the gag and cutting her bonds. "Don't try to talk yet. Just rub your hands and kick your legs till you get the blood to circulating. Hi! Halt!"

This to Coombs, who had struggled to his

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feet and was making for the exit. With a snarl of despair the outlaw turned back.

"Try that again and we'll bury you right here," warned Crockett. "—— your hide! The common kind of killing's too good for you."

For a moment Coombs believed he was to be executed on the spot, but the girl now limped to the hunter's side and threw her arms about his neck and clung to him convulsively, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Folks don't usually take on so when all their trouble is over," Crockett faltered.

"Women folks do," she whimpered. "It—it isn't the danger—so much. It's the terrible treachery. Men I reckoned were father's—friends—my friends. Then to find them—so hideous."

"It beats all creation how a snake can wriggle along and not be suspected," condoled Crockett. Then in an explosion of terrible wrath, "Think of that p'izen varment of a Coombs—riding back and forth—leading posses—hunting for you. Think of the unhuman hound fetching messages he claimed was sent by Potter Dick, and all the time they was written in the cabin by that villain, Skow."

"Skow in it?" she gasped, raising her white face. "Why, he—he visited at our home. He visited at Jim's home. To think he's in it!"

"He ain't in it now," gently comforted Crockett. "He's seen his mistake and quit for good. Now we must be getting clear of here. Jim Macon and the others are well-nigh crazy, I 'low. You go ahead and I'll fetch up the two varments. I see Melver has got back his senses."

"There's another hole under rocks near here where they keep horses," she informed.

"We don't need any horses. We're right back of the cabin. In fifteen minutes we'll be seeing our friends." As he spoke he unfastened Melver's legs, remarking, "I wouldn't 'a' taken the trouble to bind you so tight but I expected there was more of your kidney inside here. Now you've had a sample of the way I treat scum of your caliber you'll do just as I say, or I'll shoot holes through your legs and leave you to be 'dismissed' by the wolves. Walk carefully, Miss Tillie. You two chaps fall in line and forward march!"

As they filed from the opening and were proceeding along the first passageway a man glided in from the outer passage and confronted them, a pistol in each hand. Crockett saw he was the same man he had flung down the stairs in the River Annex, recognizing him by his full beard. The hunter attempted to get between him and the girl, but she on beholding him, gave a glad cry and ran into his arms, announcing—

"Colonel Crockett has captured them!"

"I see," was the cool reply. And the stranger slipped an arm around her and leveled a pistol at the two prisoners and the hunter. "You gentlemen go back into that hole!"

"You don't understand! Colonel Crockett is behind the villains!" she cried, trying to free herself from his encircling arm.

"He's as bad as the others!" was the cold reply. "Get back there, or I fire. You're so nicely lined up one bullet will do for two. And I'll have one pistol left for the bear-hunter."

Crockett endeavored to maneuver behind his human breastworks so as to send home a bullet but dared not fire because of the girl. The stranger was fully aware of his advantage and held her firmly before him as a shield.

"You rotten coward!" fumed the hunter.

"It doesn't look as if you'd go to Congress," was the soft reply. "Back into that hole!"

By this time Melver and Coombs found their voices, and the former shrieked: "Don't! Don't! Don't do it, Chief!"

"He'll blow us up!" frantically yelled Coombs. "There's a barrel of powder hid here! He'll blow us up an' bury us under the rocks!"

"Potter Dick!" exclaimed Crockett, crowding Coombs aside, preliminary to knocking Melver from his path and rushing the bandit.

"You don't understand," the girl began, unable to grasp the full import of the rapid dialogue. "Colonel Crockett is back there——"

Melver gave a wild scream, and mad with fear lowered his head and dashed forward. The narrow passage was filled with the report of the pistol and Melver went down, shot through the head. Coombs, stampeded by the same terror, followed on the heels of his companion. Dick shifted his

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second pistol to his right hand and could have disposed of Coombs, but elected to deal first with Crockett. He drew the girl aside and Coombs crashed into the wall. Now the path was cleared for the man from the cane, and Crockett leaped forward.

The pistol crashed and the hunter felt a handful of hair ripped from his tough scalp and for a moment reeled back. Thinking him mortally wounded Dick released the girl and turned to follow Coombs, who by this time had negotiated the sharp turn and was emerging into the outer air. The outlaw sensed his danger too late, for as he attempted to wheel and meet the hunter the later was upon him, grunting joyously.

As they clinched and swung clear of the girl Crockett cried out to her:

"Run, Tillie! Run!"

Dick snatched at the pistol in the hunter's belt, and had wrenched it loose when Crockett managed to seize his wrist, and with the same terrible fingers that had straightened the poker he gave a twist that sent the weapon clattering to the rocky floor. Dropping the wrist he succeeded in drawing his knife only to have his arm pinned to his side. He dashed his free fist into Dick's face and exclaimed in amazement as the blow tore the full beard loose, revealing the craggy features of Brink.

His astonishment threw him off his guard for a moment and Dick, alias Brink, snarled sardonically and pinioned the hunter's other arm.

"I told you once I'd break your bones if we ever quarreled," he hissed, beginning to exert an awful pressure as he constricted his arms.

"Shoot me if I wasn't taken in all over!" gasped Crockett, glaring incredulously into the evil face. "—— your eyes! I don't like them."

And he ducked his head and smashed it into the evil countenance.

With a terrible oath Dick attempted to drive his knee into the hunter's stomach, but Crockett was proof against such tactics, and the effort served only to loosen the bandit's hold on Crockett's right arm. With a mighty wrench he tore his knife-hand free. The two smashed to the floor, and the next instant Dick's evil career had ended.

Before Crockett could rise from his knees a man blocked the end of the passage, and there came the curt command—

"Stick yer hands up!"

It was Hogan and he had the hunter covered with a pistol. From the corner of his eye the hunter saw his own pistol on the rock by his side and was about to try for it when his thoughts were knocked topsy-turvy by Hogan dropping his weapon and bawling:

"Wal, I'll be derned! The cuss from the cane!"

Vaulting over the dead body Crockett landed upright before Hogan and, kicking the pistol aside, grabbed the man's wrists.

"Easy, easy," cried Hogan with a broad grin, and making no attempt to defend himself. "I'm through rasslin' with ye."

"Who are you? What are you?" panted Crockett, still maintaining his double grip.

"I'm Joe Hogan, hired by the governor of Mississippi to run down the Potter Dick gang. Me an' my mates took a boat up the Obion as a blind to visit Skow, who we reckoned was in the gang."

"And then let the rascals have the boat to use in running Tillie Curtes off to Pirut Island!" cried Crockett.

"Yer hurtin' my wrists like the devil. No; they used their own boat. Who ye got killed back there?"

Crockett stooped and picked up Hogan's pistol and retained it, saying—

"Have a look."

Hogan advanced and stared down into the dead face, and yelped:

"Noah Brink! Ye've gone an' killed Noah Brink, man Davie!"

"Potter Dick," corrected Crockett. Then ominously, "What about batting me over the head at Wild Turkey Crick?"

"I didn't. Hicks, one of the gang, fetched ye that crack an' shot yer dog afore I could git to him. I killed him and left ye for dead at the bottom of the crick. When I seen ye on the Obion I thought ye was a ha'nt."

"I'm forgetting Miss Tillie. We'll go out and find her; then you'll explain quite a few things."

"Good! Only put that pistol up. When ye can trust me I'd like it back. I'll go ahead to please ye. Miss Curtes is right as a fiddle. Rance an' me found her an' also lighted on Coombs. Rance took Coombs

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an' the girl to the cabin, where Croper an' Tebbets are keepin' young Macon an' the judge company."

AFTER the first edge of the excitement had passed Coombs was advised to tell what he knew, the judge intimating he could become a State's witness and save his worthless neck if he divulged everything. Coombs, who persisted he was one of the lesser lights of the band, eagerly took advantage of the offer.

He described how Skow managed the theft of Macon's Bull, the negro going with him willingly at first because Skow had posed as a friend of his master. Brink, in shooting from the window the night the girl escaped from the cave, knew it was the planter he was firing at, and intended to kill him to prevent his meeting the girl. It was also Brink, he declared, who pursued Crockett through the woods and repeatedly tried to kill him.

"And I thought it was you, Hogan!" exclaimed Crockett, passing over the latter's pistol.

"When I started out I was told to suspect every one, no matter how prominent he was," grinned Hogan. "Some men mighty high up in the world had run with Murel. It was figgered that Dick might have the same kind of a followin'. I wanted to make sure, Colonel, ye wa'n't mixed up in it in any way."

"Me!" roared Crockett, gathering his heels under him.

"Softly, man Davie. Not as a murderer, ye know, but in some left-handed way. Ye'd lost everything at Shoal Crick. Ye might be tempted to house a stolen slave, ye know, without knowin' jest how the gang disposed of slaves. Anyway, I wanted to blaze a clear path as I went. I'd got all over bein' suspicious, then in the cave ye let on that Macon's Bull was killed by the outlaws, an' I wondered how ye knew. But when Hicks tried to do for ye I knew ye was all right for sure. An' when ye busted from the woods an' took a shot at me as I was tryin' to take a drink of water I mighty soon decided ye was no ghost. I tried to call out to ye, but ye give me no time. I couldn't stick 'round for a chance as there was a strange boat anchored at the mouth of the Obion, the same one they took the girl away in. I'd learned the River Palace was the headquarters. I jumped for there afore they fetched the girl along."

"Who toted Bull's body from the crick to the hole in the ledge?" asked Crockett. "I'll admit I laid that trick up to you, Hogan, and your friends."

"It was Dick," eagerly broke in Coombs. "——, but he was a strong feller! No one else in the gang could 'a' lugged the Bull like that."

"I'd like to hear from the little lady," said Crockett, glancing toward Miss Tillie, who sat between her happy father and lover.

"All I can say is that when Mr. Brink—Dick, I mean—rushed into the cabin on the island and rescued me one of the men tore his beard loose and I recognized him as father's old friend."

"Friend!" bitterly exclaimed the judge. "And I would have trusted that man——"

"You certainly did," Crockett cut in and he nodded to the girl.

"When he told me he had followed the kidnapers in a small boat and was there to rescue me I believed him. The beard was worn so none of the gang would recognize him, he said; and it sounded reasonable. I never doubted him till he held me in front of him when we were leaving the rocks."

"The chief was afraid of Crockett," spoke up Coombs. "When he found the colonel here at the post he gave orders that he be watched and be 'dismissed' if he got nosey. When ye went huntin' for the girl Hicks was told to see ye didn't come back. No one counted on Hogan's bein' with ye. Skow was Dick's right-hand man an' kept the books. Cherokee was the gang's head man at Natchez."

"Tillie and I are going back to Jackson and be married," announced Macon.

"The most sensible thing I've heard since I started to get a two-gallon jug filled," indorsed Crockett. "And as the water 'round here don't agree with me, suppose we licker?"

"We'll drink to man Davie's goin' to Congress!" cried Hogan.

"With all my heart," said Judge Curtes. "I shall not run against you, Colonel."

"But you're welcome to, Judge," assured Crockett. "The more the merrier, as old man Johnson 'lowed when two bears fell through the roof of his shack and landed on him in bed. But first we'll drink to the health of Miss Tillie and Jim!"

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CROCKETT did not win his first congressional campaign, as his opponent insisted the tariff was responsible for cotton selling at twenty-five dollars a hundred; and the bear-hunter lost out by two votes. Two years later, however, with cotton down to six dollars a hundred, the colonel was elected by a majority of more than thirty-five hundred. And from then on, until killed in the gallant defense of the Alamo, he was a national figure.

A RUM STORY BUT TRUE

by **R. T. M. SCOTT**

ON A quiet afternoon in a front-line trench Private Mulligan for once found time to do something besides work. Being naturally of a roving disposition he wandered down the trench past the officers' dug-out. That being about as far as he dared to rove without permission he turned and came back.

As he again passed the officers' dug-out he gently twitched the rubber sheet hanging over the doorway. His glance inside decided him. Once more he approached the dug-out and leaned up beside the door. With careless air, but very carefully, he looked from right to left. Then, like a flash, he slipped inside. He was alone. That was his first concern. The next minute his eye fell on a bottle. It was an old whisky bottle and appeared to be about half full. Long had he dreamed of laying hands on the officers' rum supply. In a second the bottle was at his lips and the gurgle began. Then there was a look of horror. The bottle fell with a crash and Private Mulligan sank to the floor groaning. In a moment he yelled for help.

An officer's servant stuck his head in the door. A glance showed him Private Mulligan and the broken bottle. He knew what had been in that bottle and he guessed what Mulligan had thought it had contained so he ran to the first-aid dug-out.

"Mulligan has drunk sprayer solution and is dying," he told the hardened first-aid men.

Sprayer solution is used for driving poison gas from the bottom of trenches where, being heavier than air, it collects.

"You go, Bill," said one first-aid man. "The —— blighter might of committed suicide proper by stickin' his —— head over the parapet. How can you bandage a poisoned man?"

So Bill went and found Mulligan groaning and swearing on the floor.

"Get the cook," said Bill.

"Which cook?" asked one of a group that had collected.

"Why the ossifers' cook," replied Bill. "This is a select job, this is."

And Oliver, the officers' cook, was dragged from a sound sleep.

"Look here, my boy," said Bill, "you get a tin of mustard and mix it up in a cup of boiling water and if you don't hurry I'll ask the captain to detail you to dig this here man's grave."

Oliver went away and really did hurry while Bill sat down and lit a cigaret.

When the hot mixture arrived Bill arranged his attack like a general, lavishly using the group of spectators. He called out four men and gave each an arm or a leg. To a fifth he gave the head and then ordered a sixth to keep Mulligan's mouth open—with a bayonet if necessary. Oliver was instructed to pour down the mustard.

When the operation was over and Bill was satisfied that enough of the emetic had gone down the right way they carried Mulligan outside to note results, laying him on a fire-step.

Just then the captain came along and Oliver told him what they had done with poor Mulligan.

"Let me see that mustard tin," said the captain, spying it in Oliver's hand.

"My ——!" he exclaimed on taking the tin. "This is not Keating's mustard. This is Keating's insect-powder!"

Oliver's jaw dropped in dismay and Bill was sent for double-quick.

"What in —— do you mean by giving the man poison?" asked the captain. "This is insect-powder, you idiot!"

"Sorry, sir," said Bill, "but he's better now. It worked fine."

"Well," said the captain, looking relieved, "it's a good thing to know anyway."

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Last Man Out

by Jack Bechdolt

WHEN it was completed the tunnel would bore through two hills and pierce the bed of a lake lying between them. Except for that portion lying under the lake it was finished.

The tunnel first saw the light as a straight line. A gray-headed and extremely high-priced engineer had drawn the line with a pencil and ruler straight across a profile map while Peter Rice, boss of the Pacific Power Company, had looked over his shoulder.

"If you must have water-power, there's the way to get it," said the engineer.

"How much?" grunted Rice.

When he heard the figure he ordered the thing done.

But the tunnel was not to be done so easily as that—not the part that passed under the lake. Already it had killed several men and it threatened to engulf the fortunes of Holt & Regan, the contractors who were building it.

On a day it reached a stage of frightfulness that brought Ed Regan, junior of the contracting firm, from the city in his big automobile to consult with George Post, engineer in charge at Nooksack Lake. Post and Regan had been close friends until Molly Rice, daughter of Peter, had come between them.

Post had been engaged to marry Molly, but a year previous Molly had broken the engagement while Post was in Alaska on a railroad job. Since then the engineer had not seen her, though he knew what all their friends knew; that Molly was engaged, or about to become engaged, or might at any time be engaged, to Ed Regan.

Since he had come to Nooksack, Post had been far too busy to think often of Molly and certainly he had no expectation of finding her a passenger in Regan's car. Regan himself was not quite clear how this happened, for Molly had manipulated tactfully until she forced the invitation from Regan without her host suspecting the truth.

This first meeting in many months had been rather awkward. Post had heightened the mutual discomfort by a curt refusal to let Molly visit the man-killing tunnel; so, at Regan's suggestion, Molly had been driven away to visit a mountain-pass and return within an hour when their business would be finished.

There was a strained little silence after the car rolled away. Post was finding an old grief as bitter as it was at first shock and Regan guessed what ailed his friend. The contractor relieved the situation by getting back to business.

"So you're really up against it this time?" he queried.

"As I wired you," Post agreed. "We struck quicksand in the heading. It started to flood the tunnel and we boarded it up. I told Holt from the start we should have used a steel shield to get that hole through. The lake-bottom, it's everything nasty: muck, slime, ooze, everything that ties up work and kills off men."

"I know," Regan agreed. "I was always afraid of that. I wanted Holt to drive the tunnel with sectional steel tube, but he depended on the test holes he'd had dug. He still swears you're driving through glacial clay——"

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"Clay!" scoffed Post. "Look out there."

He pointed toward the lake. Some distance from shore the quiet waters bubbled with geysers, a half dozen of them strung along in a row.

"Where it's boiling there, is where the air leaks out," Post explained. "Clay! I tell you that tunnel's just like a rotten old auto tire, it's leaking in a dozen places. I have to be careful of the air-pressure down there for fear I'll blow the whole top off it."

"I know, George," Regan repeated quietly. "Been afraid of that all along. But you know how Holt is when he's made up his mind. I'll have to take a look so I can tell him I saw it with my own eyes before I can convince him to give you the equipment you'll need. It's a mercy his pigheadedness hasn't wrecked the job!"

When they emerged from Post's quarters they were dressed for underground. Both wore hip-boots, soft shirts, stiff rubber sou'westers, and squam hats tied under their chins. They stumbled along to the mouth of the shaft at the lake shore through which they could descend to the tunnel.

Except that there was an engineer on duty to operate the crude elevator that lowered men and material and the power-house crew kept moving the machinery which furnished light and compressed air to the workings, the place was strangely silent. Regan commented on this inactivity with a frown.

"Costs us money to keep all these sandhogs loafing," he objected. "Can't you do anything with 'em while——"

"Not a thing," declared the engineer. "The way it is it's not safe for any man to work down there—with the lake ready to pour in and fill up the hole any minute. I wouldn't go myself, except on business."

"There are pleasanter things," Regan agreed as the elevator dropped them to the bottom of the vertical shaft.

SUNLIGHT disappeared abruptly. They plunged from the hot, dry daylight to cold gloom, pricked here and there by red-glowing electric bulbs. The stench of glacial clay, clay that had lain buried for countless centuries from the wholesome air and sun, mounted in their nostrils like ammonia fumes.

There was muddy water underfoot and muddy water sweated in through the pores of the concrete that lined the lateral tunnel —the hole under the lake—into which they turned. The bore was murmurous with the slosh of water that drained away beneath the planks they trod.

A narrow, light railway track followed the center of the tunnel, on it a number of idle muck-cars. As they crowded past these their hands groped along their muddy, wet sides. Soon they became plastered with a universal gray coating that smelled of the chill decay which goes on beneath the earth.

Presently the tunnel came to an end in a steel disk that filled it completely. In this disk was a low door, swung partly inward revealing the interior of a short, steel tube of the diameter of the bore. They had reached the air-lock.

A man, dressed as they were, squatting on a little bench inside this metal chamber, evidently had been expecting them. He grinned up at Post and nodded. Like everything in this earthy burrow he was covered with muck—gray and dripping with it, and even the skin of his face looked gray and unhealthily moist.

"How you feeling now?" shouted Post cheerfully.

The man shrugged and muttered an answer that was drowned by the clang of the metal door shutting behind them.

"That's Hanson," Post explained. "Had a touch of the bends the other day so I put him on this job—it's better for him."

"Bends, eh? Bad stuff!" Regan shouted at the lock tender.

"In the leg," Hanson related, glad of an audience. "Felt 's if somebody was sawin' it off—with a dull saw——"

He said more about the symptoms of the mysterious disease common to men who work under air-pressure, but his voice was drowned by a terrific blast of wind spilling from the air-cock he had just opened. Unable to talk the three men squatted with their backs to the wall and waited.

Air-pressure increased rapidly. Giant fingers squeezed against their ears; their protruding eyes watered. They swallowed continuously and pinched their noses for relief. Thus they filled the air cavities of the body with an atmosphere as dense as that of the room and adjusted themselves to another world.

A dense fog rose and presently blotted out everything, even the red electric bulb. the humid air was being wrung dry as a

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sponge is wrung dry. Suddenly the fog disappeared, the inflow of air ceased and they shifted to their feet.

"How many pounds you carrying?" asked Regan.

"Seventeen—all I dare on account of the weak spots."

"Double atmosphere—bad enough," commented the contractor.

Now Hanson could push open the door at the far end of the steel chamber and let them into the farther end of the tunnel where the air was twice as thick as on the earth. While the pressure in the lock was normal that door leading beyond was sealed tight by the weight of seventeen pounds on every square inch of its surface. As quickly as the air in the lock was pumped to a pressure equalling that in the tunnel beyond, the outer door of the lock was sealed and the inner one could be opened. It was the lock-tender, controlling the valves that raised or lowered the atmosphere in his little steel chamber, who held the key to the advanced end of the tunnel. The lock he controlled was burglar-proof.

Post and Regan stepped through to the new working. The door was closed behind them and they heard the faint sigh of the air exhaust.

Regan stopped with a frown.

"Look here," he said, "he's gone outside again. I don't like that."

"Oh, Hanson's all right," Post assured him. "He knows we're here and he won't desert us. The air-pressure's bad for his bends so naturally he doesn't care to stay with us. See here." He pointed to a short iron crowbar hung by a rope from the inner side of the steel lock. "That's our door-bell. He can hear us rapping with that whenever we want to get out."

Electric lights were strung at short intervals along the roof of the tunnel. The bore was about eight feet high and, like the portion outside the lock, lined with concrete—a smooth, round hole. Not far from the lock these concrete walls ended and the rest of the hole under the lake was like any square mine-gallery, about nine feet from floor to ceiling, shored with heavy timbers and sealed tightly, floor, walls and roof with plank.

The frameworks of bulky timber were set at close intervals and the short lengths of plank driven in behind them were adjusted snugly. Between the cracks of this planking water dripped continuously, and fantastic squirts of mud, that looked like the serpents of paint artists squeeze from tubes, festooned the chamber. The jealous earth resented the intrusion of man beneath the lake. With all the weight of the water above to reinforce it, the vast bed of clay and ooze and quicksand was seeking entry into the tunnel. At one point primeval force had buckled one of the massive overhead timbers until it cracked; at another the floor bulged upward. One might easily imagine that a giant boa-constrictor had wrapped its coils about the tube and was slowly tightening them in order to destroy it. Except that the interior of the hole was kept pumped up with air this could have happened.

Just beyond where the concrete work ended Regan and Post passed through a shower-bath that streamed from the ceiling.

"There's the worst blowout of the lot," said Post. "That's just below where you saw the big whirlpool in the lake. The boys tried to set concrete forms here a couple days ago, but after they'd taken out the lagging it looked as if the whole roof would blow out, so we hustled the planks back again. I'm hoping the lake bottom will silt up if we leave it alone. Near as I can figure by sounding there's not more than four or five feet of mud between us and the water. It leaks air like a sieve."

The contractor shook his head angrily.

"Holt was a fool to try this hole without a shield," he commented. "Now let's look at that heading."

Regan pushed on hurriedly. He was plainly nervous and the engineer himself had no objection to finishing the business quickly.

About a hundred yards farther on the tunnel came to an end. It had been walled up with planking.

"Doesn't look quite so bad today," Post noted. "Last time I saw it water was streaming in. Shall I open it up?"

"Yes, guess we'd better," Regan fumed. "You know Holt—if I don't bring him a sample of the muck he'll swear you never struck quicksand but a water-pocket. We'll take a look."

They seized tools from a pile against the bulkhead and began cautiously to loosen and remove several of the planks that sealed the earthen wall. The stuff they

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laid bare was recognized by Regan who gave a quick nod of satisfaction.

"You're right, George—not that I ever doubted you," he remarked. "I'll tell Holt—hey, look't that stuff! Where's that plank?"

BY REMOVING several planks of the breastwork they had exposed a strip of sweating earth about three feet wide and five feet long. Now, as they stared, this earth had started to bulge inward as if some giant behind it was blowing it into a balloon. Before their eyes the bubble grew and grew while they fumbled and struggled to drive it back with the planks.

Then the viscous mass burst, as a soap-bubble bursts, and a wave of mud and water poured over the barrier. With every second the flow increased. The whole lake bottom was moving and the lake at its heels, splashing into the tunnel in a torrent they could not check.

Rapidly the mud thinned into water and the stream flowed down the bore behind them. They struggled in a mad world of which nothing was solid. Beneath their feet the floor heaved upward. Above the roof sagged down. The square framework of the tunnel, massive timbers, began to lean crazily as the released water turned its once firm footing to soup.

Regan seized the engineer by the arm and whirled him about. They started at a run for the air-lock. Already they were splashing in a stream ankle-deep, lurching crazily, half supporting each other along the slimy footway.

"Good-by — tunnel," gasped Regan. "Serves Holt — jol — jolly — well — right. Thank God!"

They had reached the air-lock.

Post snatched the dangling crowbar and beat an alarm on the steel door.

"Not much time to spare," he panted with a calculating glance at the water rising above their ankles. "Once that water rises above the door-sill——"

"And Hanson couldn't get the door open —more likely couldn't get it tight shut again," Regan completed. "Hammer again, George, he's slower than justice. Again."

Alternately Post thundered at the door and pressed his ear against the steel, listening for the rush of air that would tell them the lock was opening. Both men fixed their gaze on the water rising about them. It had reached the lower end of the little door through which they must escape —it was rising faster. The tunnel echoed with the hollow laughter of the stream. One of the shoring timbers gave way with a roar like a cannon.

"He must have heard me," muttered Post. "He must—if he's there— But sure, he's there. It's not like Hanson——"

His eye met Regan's.

"What's that you say?" he shouted.

"The bends—had 'em once, you said. You know how it is, they'll take a man anywhere, any time. Suppose——"

Regan's eyes dilated as he watched the water rising above the door level.

His lips fluttered so that he could scarcely articulate.

"This," he stammered, "th—this—no joke, George."

With sudden accord they pressed their ears tight against the steel plates, listening intently. In a frenzy Post began to beat the steel with the crowbar. Sparks flew, sweat washed rivulets through the mud that masked his face. He stopped.

"That's rotten," he remarked quietly. "I'm losing my mind— Well, old Ed?"

Regan forced his lips into a grin that was ghastly.

"Well, old George?"

"Looks like it—certainly does," jerked Post.

"Remember that case? In Cleveland, wasn't it? The gang that drowned like this? Trapped in a hole—it's——"

"No, by thunder. Not yet—not yet Ed. We've still time——"

Post thundered again on the door. He snatched the crowbar from the thong that held it.

"I'll smash it in," he shouted.

Regan touched him on the arm.

"No use, old man," he said quietly. "You know — and I know — dynamite wouldn't budge it. Listen, George, I'm glad, anyhow, I got company—somebody I know. Pretty selfish, I guess, but, God, it's lonesome—to die. And I guess we always did—like each other. Eh, George?"

Post nodded, his eyes on the water. Already it was above their knees, reaching for their waists.

"Besides," he spoke, completing his thought, "there's Molly."

"George—man, don't!"

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"It's the truth, Ed. I guess the truth won't hurt now. You know I—well, we were engaged, practically, ever since we were kids. Then she broke it off—I suspect it was—well—on your account, Ed. Perfectly all right, of course—her privilege, if— Ed, does she—are you sure, dead sure, it's you she—wants?"

"I—I'm pretty sure—yes, sure. She, well, she shows it, in a thousand ways. Not settled you understand, but ——"

Post nodded.

"Yes, I know. So long as it wasn't me I —I'm glad it was you, sure I am. Look here, George, I've been thinking this over. It's all off here; Hanson couldn't open that lock if there was a million in it. Nobody could. But, well, there's a way; that is a slim chance——"

"A chance!"

The electric globes still lighted the flooded tunnel. They caught the wild, incredulous stare in Regan's eyes, rolling until the whites shone against his grime-smeared face. He made a fearful picture.

"Just a chance, and that's all. Come here."

Post grasped his friend by the arm and led him from the lock a short distance to that point just where the concrete walls ended—where the water rained down from above.

He pointed at the dripping roof.

"There it is," he said, "a chance; at least for one of us."

Regan stared stupidly.

Post explained.

"I mean, get that lagging out of there, break out that mud—Ed, you remember those two cases in the East River tubes at New York—the sandhogs that got blown out of the river? The air blew them right through the mud and out. They both lived. If we dug a hole upward— Of course, the lake would come in, but for a minute the air-pressure—it's getting stronger all the time as the water rises—there would be a regular volcanic eruption for a moment, and the man on top——"

"The man on top!" shouted Regan wildly.

"That's it. You see, we got to reach that roof in order to dig out. If one of us held up the other—— We can both swim and the first fellow through stands a pretty fair chance. It's no worse than diving to the bottom of the lake. There's a depth of about eighteen feet above us."

"By all that's holy," said Regan, "there is a chance—a thousand to one shot, yet for the first man out—— But how about the other chap, the under-dog?"

Post shook his head dubiously.

"He might make it," he admitted. "If he could make a quick jump for it—if the downpour didn't take him off his feet—if—— Oh, what's the use of that? Ed, get that heavy stuff off you!"

Post began to strip off his own rubber coat, hat and boots.

"But wait," shouted Regan. "Who stays down? Here, we were always matching coins, I'll match you."

Post shook his head.

"That's already settled, I stay."

"You! Why you?"

"There's Molly," said the engineer grimly. "She needs you."

"But—b-but——"

"Regan, if I thought for a second that my getting out would make her happier, nothing in God's world would give you that chance. But I don't think that. I know, and so—you go first."

"It—it's—almost murder, I——"

Post seized his friend roughly and began tearing the coat from him.

"Look at that water, you fool," he shouted. "Now, up you go. On my shoulders, that's it. The crowbar—get it under those short boards. Make it? Dig, you tarrier. Now you're shouting. Another? Good, get 'em all down—as big a hole as you can, Ed. If we're going to drown let's do it quick."

Loose planks showered down and floated off. Mud and water rained on them.

The pair of them were coated thick with muck—drenched to the skin. Regan stopped his frantic digging.

"George," he shouted, "George, if I make it I'll tell her— I——"

"Dig, you fool, dig."

Post's words were blotted out by a convulsion that mingled air, water and earth in one vast maelstrom. All conscious life ended.

ABOVE the quiet surface of the lake rose a vast waterspout—a column of mud and débris of timbers. A few seconds it stood visible in a solid column, then subsided.

In the swirl of wreckage and whirling currents moved a man—Regan. Unconscious to every sensation he swam. It was

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his will to swim when the upheaval of imprisoned air stunned him, and his arms and legs moved by some blind instinct.

Astounded men on the lake shore saw that moving figure. Boats put out.

Regan regained life choking on a mouthful of brandy. Out of the faces that ringed him in, where he lay in the engineer's shack, his eye fixed on one.

"Molly," he murmured.

His hand found hers.

"Mr. Regan," one of the men spoke, "the boys just found Hanson. All crippled up with the bends he is. Had tried to crawl out of the tunnel."

"George?" cried Regan hoarsely. "George Post?"

Several shook their heads.

"Boats out looking for him," said one.

The hand in Regan's grasp tightened convulsively.

"Is he——" Molly stammered at the word.

Again her lips framed the question, but inaudibly.

"I'm afraid—afraid he is, Molly. You see he gave up his chance for you—for us——"

"Gave up his chance for me!"

Molly's clenched hands rose to her breast. Her face was white. There was terror in her stare.

"Boys!"

Regan waved his hand in dismissal. The little group vanished, leaving them alone. He told her the story.

"You see," he explained, "because he loved you; because he knew I loved you and he thought—we both thought—Molly!"

Molly had sprung up wildly.

"He thought that?" she cried hysterically. "That it was you—you, I wanted to live. He died thinking that! When I—I——"

"Molly!"

She saw Regan's ghastly face and realized his tragedy.

"Ed, don't blame yourself. Blame me. I know I let you think that; it was all my fault! I let him think so, too; but, Ed, it was George I loved—always George. Because I thought he had tired of me; because I was proud—and a fool—I let him go. But it was always George I wanted. Why, I forced myself on you today just to see him again! I loved him and I let him go and now I—I've killed him."

Hands pressed to her eyes she swayed forward.

"Regan! Regan! Oh, Mr. Regan!"

One of the tunnel crew burst into the room.

"Listen," he shouted, "Telephone—from 'cross the lake. They got him—got George Post. One of their boats found him floating. He— he— Got a pulmotor working. He's all right, they say—all right!"

"Across the lake? Where?" Molly spoke.

The man pointed through the open door.

Her eyes fixed on that distant shore Molly swept past him. He shouted after her:

"Hey, miss! Wait a minute. Look out there. Head her off! Godfrey, I thought she was going to walk right into the lake! That's better; they'll row her across. She's all right now, Mr. Regan."

But Regan had turned his face to the wall. The sand-hog looked sharply at him, scratched his head in perplexity, and tiptoed clumsily from the cabin.

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The Devil Takes Care of His Own

By Roy P. Churchill

Author of "Pay-Day," "Helluvanote," etc.

LIBERTY days on the supply ship *Nero* left her so short-handed as to officers that often the quartermasters stood their regular watches as officers of the deck. Leaving a signal boy on the bridge, Hubbard Allen went below at eleven-thirty, half an hour before his relief, to see that all was well with his principal responsibility.

The prisoner sat cross-legged on the deck with a ditty box before him, playing solitaire. He was in double irons, but turned the cards deftly with his manacled hands. He glanced up sullenly as Allen appeared.

"How near to mess gear?" he asked.

"Seven bells has gone," answered the quartermaster, examining the irons.

"Loosen 'em up a little, can't you?" complained the confined man. "They're cuttin' my wrists half off."

True enough, the steel bands seemed much too tight, and Allen eased them a trifle. Then satisfied that the prisoner in his charge was safe, he went back to the bridge, and at twelve o'clock when the crew was piped down to dinner, turned over the deck to his relief, repeating his special orders in regard to "Dutch" Burch. It was then that Chad Pollister, the master-at-arms, and the cook of No. 4 mess appeared on the bridge.

"Burch is gone, and can't be found above or below decks," he reported to Midshipman Reed, who was relieving Quartermaster Allen.

At once there commenced a thorough search. But there was no trace of the prisoner except the scattered cards. A messenger brought the first lieutenant.

"I saw the prisoner just before Allen came down at eleven-thirty on his regular inspection," explained the master-at-arms, "and tightened up his irons a notch. After that I was busy seeing that the tables were down and mess gear spread until pipe-down. When I came back with the cook at eight bells to feed him, he was gone."

"Where do you keep your key to the irons?" asked the first lieutenant.

"Here, sir, on this ring with the others," answered Pollister glibly.

"And you, Allen?" The first lieutenant turned to the quartermaster.

"I have just turned mine over to Mr. Reed."

"Did you tamper with the irons?"

"Burch complained, so I let them up some," admitted Allen honestly.

Abruptly the first lieutenant issued orders.

"Take the deck, Mr. Reed. Make a formal report of the escape of Prisoner Burch, and see if there is a boat missing.

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You two men go on at your regular duties for the present."

From the beginning things looked bad for Hubbard Allen. In the first place, he was in direct charge, and it seemed impossible that if Dutch Burch had been properly ironed at eleven-thirty he could get away without a trace by twelve. Also with a dingey missing, which was found a day later under the wharf, the first lieutenant could not understand how without carelessness or connivance the man on watch on the bridge had let it get away unnoticed.

The situation resolved into a court-martial where the master-at-arms was exonerated, and Hubbard Allen given six months at hard labor in a naval prison, which sentence was to have been the just reward of Dutch Burch.

So quick and startling was Hubbard Allen's change from a first-class quartermaster in temporary charge of the deck of his ship to a prisoner, shoveling sand and gravel into a concrete mixer, that he had small time to speculate upon causes and effects. But once settled into his routine of toil, Allen went back over that memorable day for clues and causes.

Exactly what had happened might have puzzled a shrewder and quicker thinking man than Hubbard Allen, for one of the jibes at the expense of the good-natured, slow-moving quartermaster was that his thought came by freight, and once he had his mind on a given tack, it took a broadside to divert it; but in the long six months Allen thought of almost everything that another man could have covered in less time, and came to the same conclusion that the first lieutenant had formed in the first ten minutes after the prisoner's disappearance.

"Somebody helped Dutch Burch get away," was his deduction, which was supplemented by only one other positive detail which Allen covered completely in another rebellious sentence. "And they hung it on me!"

Being entirely innocent, Hubbard Allen's resentment was directed against the service, and the fact that two weeks before the completion of his sentence he was restored to duty and paid off with an honorable discharge at his old rate of first-class quartermaster, had only a slight effect on his already solidly grounded opinion that the service had given him a raw deal.

"I'm through with that outfit," he told himself, and found a shore job where as conductor of a street-car he began to know the trials of reports, accidents and theater crowds, and where one day destiny in the shape of a familiar figure in a familiar uniform boarded his car, it being no other than Danny Wallace, just transferred to recruiting duty in that city.

The two held a joyful reunion on the back platform until Danny reached his corner, for the old quartermaster had been the younger man's instructor at the training-station and had taught him the flags and signals.

"What're you doin' here, skipperin' a land crab like this?" demanded Danny. "Don't you know, my boy, that the Navy is makin' a holler for raw recruits, and it needs every trained man it can lay its hands on?"

Hubbard Allen blushed and had no ready reply. The six months of unjustified concrete shoveling still rankled.

"I don't want to talk here," he said, "but I'm coming up to see you."

"Come on," said Danny. "You ought to see the stream of good material that's bein' taken on, each one to be taught their right foot from their left. Do you still know the flags, Hub?"

"As good as I ever did," said Allen, which was true, for he forgot more slowly even than he learned.

Glad for a chance to talk, he appeared at the recruiting-station the next day.

Danny Wallace listened carefully to Hubbard Allen's account of what happened on the supply ship *Nero*. Leaning back in a straight chair, Danny smoked his short-stemmed, black pipe, and occasionally asked a shrewd question, his eyes twinkling as his alert mind followed out one detail after another.

"He was helped and got away in a boat."

Allen nodded.

"They found the boat a day afterwards under the wharf," he said, "but they didn't find the irons."

"Overboard," explained Danny. "Who had a key besides you?"

"Chad Pollister, the master-at-arms."

"Well, my boy," said Danny, removing his pipe and pointing with it while he spoke better, "did you ever get as far along as this? If there were but two keys and you are sure that one of them was safe in your

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pocket at the time, then the other one had to do the work."

"No," said Allen, startled, but showing that his mind was in a new channel. "But that means that Chad Pollister let Dutch get away!"

"Not exactly," cautioned Danny. "But it does mean that Pollister's key let him get away. So there you are, and you oughtn't to blame the service, for the first luff had just two chances, your key or the master-at-arms', and the master-at-arms outtalked you, and had the best alibi for his key. Then when they found out that Dutch got away in a boat with you on watch and claimin' that you didn't see the boat, it looked worse. You've got no right to blame the first luff and the service. It begins to look like a frame-up and the goat bein' named Hubbard Allen."

"Maybe it was," said Allen, "but I'm getting so I like this job, and I'm not keen about shipping over."

"Who said anything about shippin' over?" smiled Danny. "Take your time. But don't you think it was pretty decent that the good old outfit handed you a big discharge so that you could go back any time you happen to want to?"

Seeing that his thrust had given Allen something to think about, Danny changed the subject.

In the next few weeks Hubbard Allen came often for heart-to-heart talks with Danny Wallace, and some of his grievances against the service began to be smoothed out as he saw the careful sorting of the recruits.

"They can ask more fool questions than any bunch I ever saw," said Allen.

"They are a little tryin'," smiled Danny Wallace patiently, "but we have to weed 'em out and get the pick. Even old-timers like you and me had to learn once. We can't expect 'em to know the service like we do."

Thus including Hubbard Allen as one of the elect, the shrewd old quartermaster shoved him one step further toward reenlistment.

DESPITE all contentions that this is a wide world, Hubbard Allen found another positive proof of its smallness when he and Dutch Burch found themselves facing each other across a cafeteria table.

Seeing the angry flush of recognition, Burch tried to beat Allen to it, and place their meeting on a basis which suited his own notion.

"Well, if it ain't old Hub," he grinned, "all dressed up like a chief petty officer. How they been treatin' you since I bid you adieu on the old *Nero?*"

As a further proof of friendship Dutch reached for the check, but Allen drew it back.

"Never mind," he said coldly, "I'll pay for mine."

And then moving bluntly to the point of the thing that had worried him so long, he demanded—

"How'd you get away, Dutch?"

"Me? Easiest thing in the world. After you inspected at seven bells I unlocked the irons, and when they commenced throwin' down the tables at mess gear I slipped out the cargo port and made it to the punt. One of those slow freight-ferries was passin' and I stayed out of sight behind it until I made shore. Kinder simple, wasn't it?"

"They laid it on me," accused Allen.

"Sure," sympathized Burch. "Somebody had to get a leather medal. That's the way with the stiff-necked, regulation outfit, pickin' on an innocent man. What'd they give you?"

"You fellows were the cause of it," continued Allen, ignoring the question.

"Me and Chad?" cried Burch, feigning shocked amazement and surprize. "We never had nothin' against you, Allen. It's the Navy you want to blame. They didn't give you a square show; just fired you into the stone frigate, all the time knowin' you was innocent, but havin' to make a goat out of somebody."

"So it was Pollister," said Allen simply, and went back to the meal he had selected without further reply.

Dutch Burch might out-talk him, but he couldn't change his mind, and sensing this the former prisoner began a detailed explanation, while Allen listened in grim silence.

"We pulled that get-away so's not to get anybody in bad," protested Burch. "I was playin' cards, and up comes Chad and I tell him that my irons is too tight. That's right before you come down. Then he feels of 'em and says so that everybody around could hear, 'Tight nothin', Dutch,

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they're too loose,' and he tightened 'em up, slippin' me the key when he left.

"I had to make a holler when you made the rounds. Two or three had heard me beefin' about 'em cuttin' my wrists. You made a mistake messin' with them irons, Hub. Whyn't you leave 'em alone?"

"They were too tight," answered Allen simply.

"Well, anyhow," said Burch, hastily skipping details to get on less dangerous ground, "I unlocked the irons when everybody cleared out at mess gear and hid the key in a place Pollister knew about. That's all there was to it. But we didn't think they'd sting you. We wouldn't have done it if we'd known it meant trouble for a shipmate."

Unable to combat with words the suave assurance of Dutch Burch, and yet feeling that the other had dodged and evaded the issue, Allen continued silent, and Dutch Burch, seeking to clench the matter then and there, went on confidently:

"Me and Chad are in the movie business now. We bought out a little place on Ninth Street, and it's goin' good. Here's a pass that's good any time."

Still not quite sure that the conquest was complete, Dutch Burch put in a final word where he felt it would do the most good.

"It's just like the Navy to kick a good man, who's only done his duty," he growled. "What d'you say we all three meet here tomorrow? Pollister'll tell you just like I do that the Navy is what you want to blame, and not us."

And to his relief Hubbard Allen agreed.

But if Dutch Burch had known what was passing in Hubbard Allen's mind he would have been less cheerful. Never having been able to switch from one thought to another rapidly, Hubbard Allen had been slowly putting together all the things that Burch had told him, and could not yet see how any explanation could alter the facts that he had suffered for Chad Pollister's release of the prisoner, and that protestations were but proof of the intention of Pollister and Burch that he should suffer.

Burch's individual case was easier. From the beginning Hubbard Allen had meant to turn him back to the Navy authorities. This duty had seemed so evident to him that given small chance, he had not even mentioned it to Burch. But with Pollister and Burch together it was different, and Hubbard Allen went straight to Danny Wallace that very afternoon for advice.

"So there's still doubt in your mind about this bein' a put-up job?" smiled Danny.

"A little," said Allen. "I feel like it's so, Danny, but I can't put it in words. What do you think?"

"Didn't they pick a time just after you were below, fixin' it so you would loosen the irons, and didn't Pollister know that the ship would be swingin', and you'd be checkin' the compasses so as to miss seein' the boat? Besides, what kind of a shipmate would stand by and see another man punished for his own crime? To my thinkin', count Pollister in on this more than Dutch. He planned it all, and fixed it so the blame would come to you, while Dutch simply followed orders and got away."

Danny's position was just what Allen needed to clear his mind.

"Let's have them both arrested, if we can," he urged. "Burch is a deserter, but Pollister is out of the service now, and not subject to regulations."

"That part wouldn't be hard, Hub, one warrant for a deserter, and one for hiding a deserter would get 'em both."

"I'm to meet them at twelve o'clock tomorrow," said Allen eagerly. "Why not arrest them then?"

"It takes time to get the papers fixed, and the skipper is out of town today. Besides, Hub, what's your hurry? Go on and meet 'em and tout 'em along. Find out when you could catch 'em both together, and the number of their place on Ninth Street."

A quicker-thinking man than Hubbard Allen might have noted that Danny Wallace was racking his brain for excuses for delay, the truth being that Danny Wallace was trying to effect the arrest of the two men without harmful publicity to the service he loved. It struck a sensitive place in Danny's heart every time he read in the paper that a deserter had been captured and punished. Danny knew that such things had to be, but he regretted that they were published broadcast, often giving a false impression.

"We don't want to make an arrest in a crowded cafeteria," he told Hubbard Allen. "Find out where we can get them with the least fuss."

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CHAD POLLISTER and Dutch Burch, both a trifle strained but rapidly relaxing as Hubbard Allen showed no resentment toward them, went over again their explanation of the escape from the *Nero*.

"It's a shame the way that outfit treats a man," concluded Pollister. "Think of punishing Hub just because he tried to be a good shipmate." Pollister nudged Dutch Burch with his foot as the latter smiled. "We'll try to make it up to you, old man. Come around to the joint, and we'll show you how it works."

"What time are you there?" asked Allen.

"We're in and out all day, but always between four and five to see that everything is ready for the night show. Drop in at the end of your run any time. It's good to know a man that had sense enough not to go back."

"There's some that couldn't get back if they wanted to," answered Allen.

"There's one thing sure," said Pollister laughing a little too loudly. "Allen here wouldn't go back on a shipmate, after what the Navy outfit did to him."

"I should say not," said Dutch. "Us three will have to hang together. Gimme the checks, Chad."

But Allen was silent, and though the other two watched him closely, his expressionless face gave no sign of what was passing in his mind, being, that distastefully and methodically he was carrying out Danny's orders.

"WELL, Pollister, old boy, what do you think of him?" asked Dutch Burch when Allen had left them to go back to his work.

The former master-at-arms shook his head.

"I don't know, Dutch. He don't talk enough. He's sore all right, but whether at us or the service I haven't made up my mind."

"Well, we sure poured it into him, anyhow," chuckled Burch. "That bunch of free tickets we gave him, and the invite to go with us out to the movie studios ought to keep him coming back and safe enough for the present. But he sure is a clam. No wonder you picked him for a mark."

"We'll have to watch him close," advised Pollister. "There's something on that boy's mind."

THAT same afternoon "Smiling Sam" Gatten, captain in the Merchant Marine, paid another of his friendly calls at the recruiting-office. Nodding comprehensively at Danny Wallace, the working force, and at the recruits, the smiling captain settled back in a chair, but placed it close enough so that he could hear what all had to say.

With the stringent law about having a full crew, coupled with a shortage of seafaring men, Smiling Sam had found a new way to man the ships that he commanded. Needing a fireman or a couple of deckhands, even an engineer or a quartermaster, he came to the Navy recruiting-station, looked over the applicants shrewdly, and when he found the man he wanted, followed him to the elevator and put the proposition up to him.

This scheme was one of Smiling Sam's own, and while other skippers wondered how he did it, he was often able to get a crew when they failed. Danny Wallace had caught him on the second visit, and there had ensued a spirited session, until a working agreement was reached between the two keen old sea-lovers.

"You can have the rejections," said Danny. "You're welcome to 'em. But if I catch you buttin' in on a likely recruit, or a previous service man, until we've passed on him, I'll find a way to keep you out of this place entirely."

"What way?" asked Gatten, still smiling, but with a different expression.

"I'll throw you out bodily," answered Danny with spirit, "then find a legal way."

The merchant captain knew that the old quartermaster meant every word of it. He smiled again, but with more warmth, and held out his gnarled hand.

"All fast," he agreed, as Danny took it, and thereafter, with this gentleman's agreement between them, Smiling Sam took for his own the best of those who for one slight reason or another the Navy found unfit for its own exacting service.

This day there was temptation in the heart of the captain, for with a larger ship, being loaded by three shifts of stevedores night and day, he needed firemen, needed them in a hurry, and so far he had met only evasion or flat denials by the experienced men available. The reason for this Smiling Sam knew quite well, and had a suspicion

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that his former ability to get men had been partly responsible for his new command.

Thus put to the test, the captain had used all the guile that his years of experience had taught him, but on the eve of sailing was still a couple of men shy, and rather desperate. He edged a little closer as a barrel-chested applicant, whose stubby fingers and thick wrists gave evidence of his familiarity with slice-bar and shovel, was held up temporarily by flat feet, and Danny Wallace spoke to Gatten as much as to the fireman when he gave the doctor's verdict—

"On account of previous enlistment application is accepted."

"He's wantin' firemen bad," Danny's brain registered as he went on with his work, and the captain settled back in his seat like a disappointed bewhiskered cat at a well-worn mouse-hole.

"Our skipper wants to know about these two warrants," interrupted a yeoman, coming in from the office of the lieutenant in charge. "That fireman that jumped ship while he was a prisoner, and the master-at-arms that's with him."

Danny did not answer immediately. A rather pleasant thought seemed to strike him about nothing in particular, and turning to the yeoman he demanded, his face registering a well-feigned lack of comprehension:

"What's that about warrants? Who're you talkin' about?"

"Those two fellows that are running the moving-picture show on Ninth Street," explained the yeoman," First-class Fireman Burch, deserter, and Master-at-arms Pollister for aiding a deserter. Here's the skipper's instructions. He said you'd know what to do about them. Maybe you'd better ask him," finished the youngster kindly, with a mental reservation that the gray-haired and lovable old quartermaster was slowing up.

"Yes, I will, son," said Danny, "I know all about it, now that you reminded me."

He laid the two papers on the table beside him where Captain Gatten might read them without difficulty if he cared to do so, and turned to answer the questions of the next recruit.

A little later Captain Gatten left the office, favoring the whole force with another of his famous smiles, and this time, as Danny Wallace noted, it had that satisfied quality as if patient waiting had been rewarded. As he went out the door, Danny Wallace chuckled again, seemingly without cause, and went on with his work.

Hubbard Allen surprized Danny Wallace by appearing at the recruiting-station within half an hour after Captain Gatten left.

"I took a lay-off on my afternoon run," he announced, "so I could attend to the arrest of Pollister and Burch."

"It's a shame to burden the service with such men," said Danny, "but they ought to be punished. Here's the warrant, and a policeman has been detailed from the station on Seventh Street to go with you. You can stop by there and get him on your way over."

Danny's manner was one of resignation, as if he had done all he could, and now had to let events take their course, but any one could see that Allen's early appearance had rather disconcerted him.

Being a full hour earlier than his appointment, Hubbard Allen had to wait in the police station until a man could be detailed to go with him. Waiting in the office and growing impatient and nervous lest Dutch Burch and Chad Pollister get away, he conceived what he thought a brilliant idea, and immediately put it into operation. Taking up the telephone he called for the movie theater number, and Pollister answered.

"This is Hubbard Allen," he said. "I'm off this afternoon, and want to come over and see you. Is Dutch there too?"

"Yes, he's here," said Pollister coldly. "What do you want to see us about?"

"Nothing in particular," said Allen, "but I'll be right over. You two wait for me," and then said good-by, and hung up hurriedly as Pollister started to ask another question.

Now satisfied that his quarry was waiting to be taken, Hubbard Allen climbed in beside the special officer in the police flivver, and they started down a cross-street to Ninth.

"I know this place," directed the officer. "We'll stop the car around the corner and I'll come in through the alley from the back. You go on in front and talk to your two men until I show up. It'll be a cinch, so don't act excited or nervous."

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AFTER Allen hung up Pollister wasted a precious minute trying to find out from central where the call was from, and, failing, he and Burch hastliy finished some packing they had already commenced.

"Don't stop for anything," advised Pollister. "This Allen boy don't love us enough to be telephoning for nothing. He was probably up at the recruiting-station getting ready to start down here with a policeman. It's a good thing we got a place to light, thanks to that old grinning pussy-cat you tried to get funny with."

Both men stuffed their clothing helter-skelter into suitcases. Pollister was through first and helped Burch with his, but neither had counted on such quick action from Hubbard Allen. As they reached the door into the vestibule Hubbard Allen came in from the street.

"Hello!" he said, startled at seeing the preparations for flight. "Where you going? You promised to wait here for me."

"None of your business where we're goin'," growled Dutch Burch. "Tried to double-cross us, didn't you?"

Allen came inside and shut the door behind him. "I have a policeman with me to arrest you two. Stay right where you are until he comes."

"Listen to the big stiff," sneered Dutch Burch. "Let's rough-house him and beat it."

With the words he rushed, but the heavy suitcase tipped over in his way as he dropped it, and while his blow landed with a vicious thump, Allen's own inexpert hay-maker sent Burch reeling backward. Pollister was more wary. He knew that Hubbard Allen with his size and strength was a hard man to overcome, regardless of his lack of skill, and that the noise of the struggle might be heard from the street. He desired to end matters quickly and silently, and looked about him for a weapon. The heavy iron bar which fastened the door stood in the corner beside Allen. Dutch Burch came on again, more cautiously.

"Bean him with somethin', Chad," he urged, and Pollister made a leap for the bar.

Burch's blow and his own righteous anger seemed to have quickened Allen's movements as well as his wits. He saw Pollister's intention, dodged Burch, and snatched the bar himself. Both men tried to wrench it from him, but with a two-handed grip in the center he twisted free, and with his back to the door stood master of the situation.

The encounter had been measured in seconds, but it seemed longer to Allen. He wondered what kept the policeman. Across the room was a door marked "Janitor's Closet." The key was in the lock. A happy idea struck him.

"Get in that closet," he ordered, waving the iron threateningly.

Pollister made a feeble protest.

"Get in!" repeated Allen, advancing a step.

The two men obeyed. Burch's eye was beginning to blacken where Allen's lucky blow had landed, and he went in without argument, but Pollister complained that there might be a leaky gas-pipe, and shoved against the door as Allen held it with his knees and turned the key.

Inside the closet Allen heard his captives kicking about among the brooms and mops as they endeavored to get settled, and then all was quiet. Just as he began to notice this, and had called once without getting a reply, the policeman appeared.

"There's a new wire fence back there," explained the officer, "and it took me a little longer to get here. Where are they?"

"They tried to get away," said Allen, "so I locked them in here."

"Don't know as I blame 'em," grinned the policeman glancing at the formidable bar of iron. "Now open the door and stand by while I put the darbies on."

"Come out one at a time, you men," ordered the officer, rapping on the closet door with the butt of his revolver.

Allen opened the door part way. No sound or movement came from the closet.

"Come out," repeated the officer, and a second later Allen flung the door wide, poking into the dark interior with his bar.

"Empty! What made you think you put 'em in here?"

"I did put 'em in," defended Allen heavily.

With the aid of a pocket flash-light a hinged square of planking in the closet's floor was found, which led to the unfinished basement, and following this through cobwebs and over dirt and rubbish left from building, Allen and the policeman finally emerged by way of the furnace-room, into the alley back of the building.

"They've gone, but we'll do what we

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can," counseled the officer. "We'll get in the car and circle around. There's just a chance we might see them. Before we start I'll telephone the description to headquarters."

"It's my fault," complained Allen, "locking them in that closet."

"Don't feel bad about it," comforted the policeman. "Lots of 'em get away from old hands."

Threading the blocks in winding circles the two men continued their vain search until nightfall.

"Might as well call it a day," suggested the policeman. "The department will get them anyhow, in a couple of days."

Worn out and discouraged Allen agreed.

He looked forward to his report to Danny Wallace with dread, and made a fruitless trip by the police station the next morning to see if anything had been heard of Pollister and Burch before he went to the recruiting-office.

To Allen's surprize and relief the old quartermaster took the bad news in fine spirit, and as the tale of the escape of Pollister and Burch unfolded, his good humor grew.

"So you made 'em abandon their clothes, and sent one of 'em off with a black eye, to boot?" he commended.

"Yes," said Allen. "If it hadn't been for that closet——"

"Never mind about the closet, boy," said Danny Wallace, "I've a little secret to tell you. The devil takes care of his own in more ways than one. We wanted this scum caught and punished, but neither of us wanted such men back in the Navy, elbowin' good clean boys. So listen to what's happened to 'em. I know where they are, and I know, too, that they're wishin' this mornin' that they was safe in some nice comfortable jail.

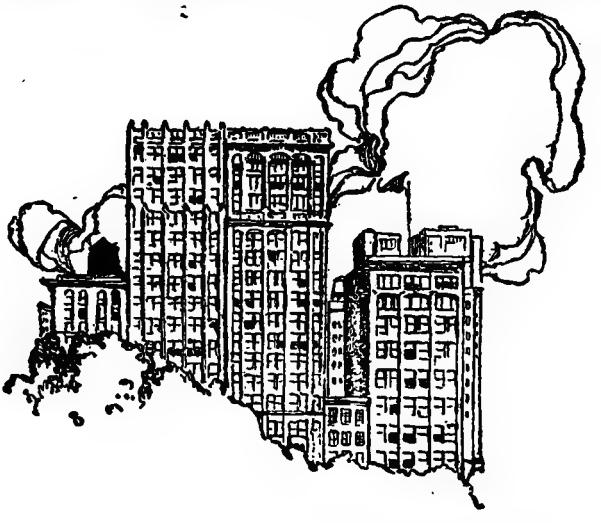
"Do you know who's got 'em under his watchful eye? Old Smilin' Sam Gatten, on the hottest ship that ever sent a limp fireman up the ash chute. That old tramp, renamed the *Corsair*, was the *Eltoro*, the last time I heard of her, and the thermometer registers hell every time they try to get more than six knots out of the old boilers. On her last trip the fire-room force got burned out so bad that a tug had to bring her in. There wasn't enough men left to fire one boiler. All you did, Hubbard my boy, was to chase 'em out of a nice, comfortable, well-greased fryin'-pan into a red-hot fire. You ought to be satisfied."

"I am satisfied," said Allen slowly, "but suppose they jump ship and get away?"

"Don't worry," assured Danny. "Smilin' Sam looks like a chess cat, but there's claws under his pads. I know the old heathen. They're good for the round trip, which'll take all of six months, and they'll sweat. You leave it to Smilin' Sam and the *Eltoro's* fire-room. They'll sweat by bucketfuls."

Hubbard Allen drew a sigh of relief and settled back in his chair. Danny Wallace looked him over kindly, expectantly, and yet well satisfied. After two minutes of such silence Hubbard Allen did not disappoint him.

"I'd like to ship over," he said.



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Law and Order

by Gordon Young

Author of "Gaboreau the Terrible," "The Devil's Own," etc.

KATE WORTH'S mother died one storm-swept night on the way up from the Horn; and three months after her father also died. He had bought the one-story, frame general store on Montgomery Street, and, having been fleeced in the deal, gave himself up to worry and typhoid. Kate, three thousand miles from kith and kin, was alone in San Francisco in the Spring of '49. Three months had been time enough for her to have met the man she loved; so with equal gentleness she refused proffers of homeward-bound fare and the privilege of becoming the mistress of any one of numerous shacks and tents. Most emphatically she refused Fash Roberts, and he said that he would make a corpse of any man whom she did marry.

Those were mad, bad days. The "Hounds" had not yet become the "Society of Regulators," and the loot and massacre of the Chilean quarter were to follow. Honest men had not yet joined together and flung a noose over a rafter—there were no convenient trees—as the symbol of the Vigilantes. Those things were to come; but for twenty years each man would be expected to protect his own life and for the next ten theft would be punished more severely than murder. "A pouch don't pack a gun"—and, of course, could not protect itself.

Men in red shirts and cowhide boots came down from the mines weighted with gold; and the boats to Stockton were jammed with greenhorns who thought themselves leaving plenty of margin by not believing more than half of what they heard. Most of them believed the wrong half.

There were good men and women in the city, but the dance halls with bars and gambling-rooms adjoining, and the people that filled them, were in the foreground. Men died nightly and were buried as they fell, being put away in the little cemetery amid the sand-dunes with a wooden slab to mark the spot against the Judgment Dawn.

After the funeral of her father Kate went back and opened the store, then sat herself on a bale of blankets and cried. And soon there came a dapper little man with a short black beard and long black hair, neatly trimmed, with threads of gray in it; and he wore a long black coat and a broad-brimmed hat; also a neat black bow-tie.

"Have I the honah of addressin' Miss Worth?" he asked, bowing low.

"I'm Miss Worth. Yes."

"I'm Colonel Sutherland. Colonel J. G. Sutherland of Geo'gia. And am I co'rect in unde'standin' that youah late bereavement has left you without a male relative to offah his protection?"

"I'm all alone, if that's what you mean," Kate said.

She thought the little man somewhat ridiculous, but she rather liked him. And well she might, for he more or less pompously, but gallantly, laid himself at her service and at the same time put her at ease by saying that he was married and had a

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daughter of about her own age, and that both daughter and wife were on the way to San Francisco; and that he, reflecting on how he would wish some gentleman to keep a careful watch on his own daughter if God in His wisdom brought such a bereavement upon her, had thought that he would merely inform Miss Worth that there was one man upon whom she could call for help, money, or advice.

It happened that Colonel Sutherland heard that Fash Roberts, a brother of Sam, leader of the Hounds, had declared his intentions of forcing himself upon Miss Worth whether or not he was agreeable to her.

Colonel Sutherland mentioned Fash, and Kate admitted that she was afraid of him.

"A low-down houn' dawg!" pronounced the colonel, and he promised to settle with Fash at once.

Kate begged him not to arouse Fash. He was dangerous. His brother was the head of the rowdies. There would be trouble. And she told the colonel of the boy, and the colonel sat attentively and nodded sympathetically.

Will Denison was only a lad, a big boyish fellow barely across his twenties. He had come into the store one day to buy a shoulder of ham, and Kate had sold it to him; and the next day he came to buy a half pound of nails; and the third he wanted some cheese; and the fourth he wanted—well, it made no difference what he wanted, for after that he quit pretending to want anything but to talk to her, and now he was gone with a partner up to the mountains to make his fortune, and whether he made it or not he had promised to come back in a month to see her; and the month was up and he had not come.

"Will Denison. Yes, ma'am. I knoaw 'im. A fine boy. A Geo'gia boy—from Jasper County. His mother's aunt married a Washburn, and one of the Washburn girls married a third cousin of my wife's. So you might say that Will was a connection of mine. Yes, ma'am. You see the Washburns——"

And having gone somewhat into the genealogy of the Georgian families, Colonel Sutherland at length came back to protest against Kate's remaining in the store alone at night.

Kate resisted the offer to put herself under the wing of the wife of some friend of his, and explained that she was not alone. Tony, the half-caste Spanish boy of about sixteen who had helped her father, would sleep in the front of the store. The colonel strongly objected to any such arrangement. It conflicted with his idea of what was due to women; and as Kate, by being engaged to Will Denison was more or less a member of the Sutherland family, he protested. But she, being of a temper that is not easily changed, listened respectfully and was of the same opinion still. It was, she said, only in the daytime that Fash Roberts bothered her. He would not dare to come at night. Besides, Tony would protect her.

Colonel Sutherland left and went down the street. He went in and out of every saloon that he came to; a little bantam of a man, immaculate in black and white, and big fellows in red shirts stared at him and poked each other in the ribs; but there was something in the colonel's eyes and also in his tranquil manner that kept the humorous remarks that followed him from being loud enough to reach his ears. He was looking for Fash Roberts and he found Sam.

"Mr. Roberts, suh," he said, tapping that notorious bully on the arm. Roberts glared down contemptuously. "I have been lookin' for youah brother, suh," said the colonel, "but I will say to you, suh, that if you have any brotherly feelin' for him you will use youah influence, suh, to keep him away from Worth's store."

Sam Roberts was drinking with a part of the Hounds, and these friends rather expected that the redoubtable Sam would bash the colonel's head or shoot him straight-off and call on them to bear witness that it had been done in self-defense. But he did nothing of the kind. He glowered down at the straight, calm little man, then turned away with elaborate carelessness as he growled:

"Don't bother me. I'll pay the funeral expenses and—" he looked the colonel over from his polished boots to his well-brushed black hat—"and if it's yourn it won't cost much for lumber!"

The Hounds burst into laughter at this jeer at the colonel's diminutive body; but the colonel, unruffled, bowed slightly and said—

"Ve'y well, suh."

Then he walked away.

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IT HAPPENED that shortly after ten o'clock that evening the colonel left his friends to continue their poker game without him, and, putting his long-barreled revolver into the holster under his black coat, he sauntered down through the town, up Montgomery Street, and unperceived by any one slipped into the shadowed side of Worth's general store.

Kate would perhaps have been less restless on her hard bed at the back of her store if she had known what watch was being kept in the shadows outside.

The lawless young town of San Francisco did not really wake up until around midnight, though the roar of voices and clash of oaths and hysterical laughter of women who sought miner's gold, rang through the streets from dusk till dawn; and scarcely a night passed without the crack of a gun—and men shot well in those days.

Shortly before midnight a man with long strides came down the street. Colonel Sutherland stepped back, merging himself against the board side of the store. The man stopped at the door, banged heavily, insistently. Colonel Sutherland jerked at the lapels of his coat and with quick pats adjusted his bow-tie: that was as much agitation as he ever permitted himself.

"Who you?" called the nervous thin voice of the Spanish boy.

The colonel could hear distinctly. The store was not only built of one thickness of board, but these were full of knot-holes.

"Tony, this is Denison. Will Denison. Where can I find Kate?"

Tony swore in joyful relief and shouted:

"She here. I call her."

Kate came flying, with a blanket wrapped about her and with her hair in disarray.

They called each other ecstatically by name as the door was flung open and across the sill they leaned in an embrace; nor did they pay any attention to Tony, who hung a lighted lantern above them—he foolishly thinking they needed light.

The boat from Stockton, Will Denison explained, had just come in; and on the way down he heard of her father's death, and he had come—not expecting to see her—but hoping to learn where he could find her. He and his partner had located a mine. It looked good. He couldn't stand it any longer from her, so he came.

"No, no, Will!" she protested as he started to step inside.

"Why?" His face was a blank surprize.

"You mustn't come in. I'm alone. It wouldn't be right."

Will understood, but he did say—

"There's Tony——"

"He doesn't count."

"Let's go right now and get married," said the resourceful young man.

"But—" she protested hesitatingly, feeling more that she ought to find an excuse than wanting to find one.

Then she remembered Fash Roberts: he had sworn to shoot the man she married.

"I can't, Will. Not tonight. Oh, boy, I love you! I do. But don't be foolish!"

What Colonel Sutherland may have thought of himself for eavesdropping on this tender scene is something that he never revealed; but it is highly probable that he approved of Kate's maidenly discretion.

Then came the interruption. A man had approached unperceived. Perhaps he had slinked along so as to come close without being seen. Anyway he was right on top of the lovers before they were aware that he was near.

He laughed scornfully, hoarsely, and he made a vicious remark, a malicious remark, too coarse to be even intimated, but one designed to insinuate that the difference between Kate and the dance-hall girls was merely one of hypocrisy.

Denison whirled about, his fists clenched to strike; and Kate cried:

"Fash! Don't shoot—please!"

Now Denison was a boy who minded his own business; and he had said that men who packed guns were inviting trouble. There were a few sensible youngsters like him among the Argonauts, but at that moment his pacificism seemed the height of folly, for Fash held a gun almost against the boy's stomach.

"I'm minded to salt you down with lead and powder an' give you to the undertaker to pack away," said Fash. "Git out o' that door an' let a man git in!"

"No!" said Denison defiantly, squaring his shoulders and backing into the door as though to block it with his dead body if need be.

Then there slipped around the corner a little shadow of a man, and a cool, soft voice said, but not pleasantly—

"Mr. Fash Roberts, suh!"

Fash, cunning gunman that he was, did

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not wheel at once, but jumped clear to the other side of the door—so that Denison would not be behind him—before he turned; and in the vague light of the lantern he recognized the colonel and recalled the warning that had been given through his brother.

"The distance, I should judge, suh, is fifteen paces," the colonel said softly, clearly, ominously. "I shall count three, and at the third count you are at liberty, suh, to fire!"

The slightest of pauses: in that fragment of a second Kate tried to scream, but her throat was closed so that she could only whisper, "Don't," and clutch at the boy, who was rather bewildered at the rapid development of the drama.

"One! Two!"

Fash fired.

"Three!" continued that inexorable voice; and at the count of three Colonel Sutherland pushed back his long black coat and with one gesture drew and fired.

Fash Roberts lurched drunkenly to the ground, dead.

Five minutes later and before the news had spread that far from mouth to mouth, Colonel Sutherland quietly edged his way amid the crowd in the bar where Sam Roberts and his fellow Hounds were drinking.

"I regret, suh," said the colonel as his fingers touched the bow of his neat, black tie, "to be the bearer of the news that youah brother is dead!"

Silence fell on those near enough to hear, and the silence spread like a ripple as when a stone drops into a pool, until all in the room stood shuffling closer and straining to hear the answer that would come.

It came coarse, blasphemously, demanding to know who had done it.

"I, suh!" said the colonel, his hands at his side, his voice low and quiet.

Then it was—then and there in that riotous bar filled with hard, bearded, red-shirted men—that the demarcation between lawlessness and stern justice was first definitely drawn. No chalk-line was visible; no words were spoken; but almost—nay, entirely unconscious of why they were doing it, men began to edge behind Roberts and his Hounds to back them up, and behind the square-shouldered little colonel who had brought to them the report of Fash Roberts' death—long deserved, but delayed because each man in that rough land was a law unto himself. The idea of men banding together to punish some one or to defend that punishment was new. There were officers, of course, but these were Hounds, bullies, grafters. But the colonel's lone slight figure, a figure of calm dignity, struck upon their subconsciousness in some unanalyzable, unrealizable way, as a figure of justice.

And as Sam Roberts glowered around him, struggling for words to answer, he became aware that there were no spectators in that room. Times had changed with the click of a second: men had become partizans, and significantly the quietest men, the ones with the grimmest faces and narrowed, unwavering eyes, were holding their gaze challengingly against his own face.

"Didn't I say I'd pay the funeral expenses!" Roberts growled, bluffed, beaten, smashed, into a sorry jest over the cold, blood-stained body of his brother because he was suddenly afraid of a little man in black who stood for honor and for justice.

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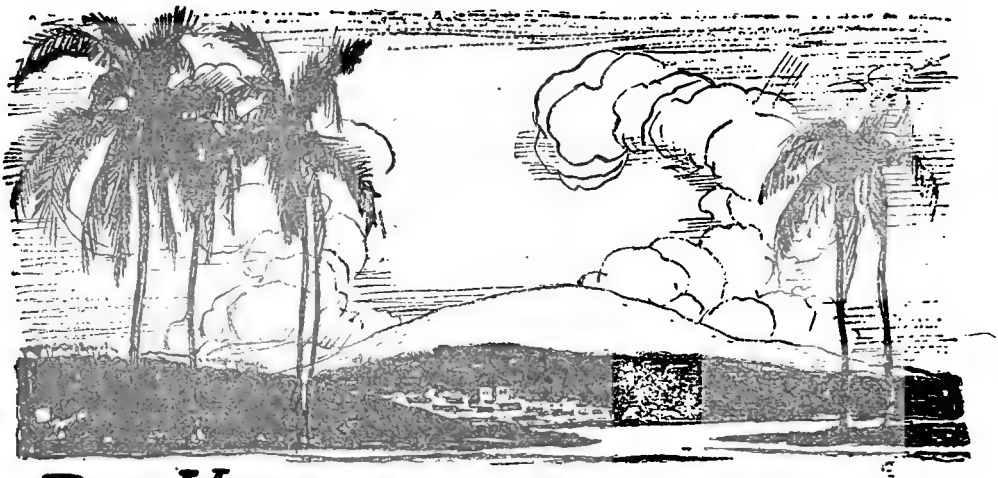

Dos Hermanos by Robert Palfrey Utter.

Author of "Shadows."

YOU might say what you liked about the food and accommodations on the old *Dos Hermanos*, but you had to acknowledge that the purser had good cigars, and parted with them on easy terms. We each had one, the captain, the purser, and I; we each had a suit of pajamas and a long chair on the after-deck. We each longed for a breeze. The *Dos Hermanos* lay about two miles off Boca del Rio, which is the capital and seaport of the sovereign republic of Aguaclara. Two miles is as near as any boat except the native skimming-dishes can get to the city.

"Ever been ashore here?" asked the purser.

"No," said I, "but I can tell you exactly what there is. There is a dock piled with bales of hennequin; there is a narrow-gage, mule-power, railroad in the street, the track half-buried in sand. Every third building is a *tienda* where flies and bad pulque are the staples. In one of these there is a pool table, expiating an evil life, the pride of the village; this *tienda* is probably called *La Sopresa*, but it couldn't surprise me."

"There's a pretty good cathedral," said the captain. "They call it the oldest on this part of the coast. They've got a painting they say one of them big Spanish painters did—they say they've been offered oodles of money for it."

"Yes," said I, "there's a Murillo or a Velasquez in every village church from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego. I've seen thirty-two of them myself."

A faint breath from the sea carried our cigar smoke over the rail. We fanned our pajama jackets to make it seem a breeze.

"And there's the monument," said the purser.

"That's different," said I. "Whose monument?"

"Félipe and Alejandro de la Luz," said the captain, "known as the liberators. The two brothers. Everything in Aguaclara is named the Dos Hermanos."

"And I suppose," said I "that they liberated Aguaclara from the grip of Spain and made it free to every adventurer who could start a fresh revolution."

"Alejandro did," said the purser.

"Not on your life," retorted the captain. "Félipe did it."

"I thought he was in jail all the time," put in the purser.

"I ought to know," said the captain. "I was in with him for four years and a half—pretty near five— —— near shot once a month the whole time."

"You!" exclaimed the purser. "Why that was years ago; that was in ——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the captain, "the date's on the monument, an' I'll admit I ain't no chicken, whatever I was then. But I'll bet I know more about the inside of that business than any man alive now—or than any one man that ever did live. Alejandro, he was just playing the winners, just like it was the stock market. Félipe he really cared. I knew him. Days an' days we'd sit there in that —— little stone jail, that was up-country at Monte Torro,

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and he'd tell me all about it. I was the only white man he could talk to, an' I didn't have no stake in the business."

"What did they have you in for?" I asked.

"Oh, the usual thing," said the captain vaguely, as if it were chronic dyspepsia.

"Félipe, now," the captain went on, "he didn't want to make a peseta out of the deal, he didn't want nothin' but just a free republic. He did all the work ——"

"Yes, but how?" interrupted the purser. "He had no army!"

"NO," said the captain, "he didn't have no army," he pointed his cigar impressively at the purser, "he had an idea. That was all he had, just an idea. All the first part of the time he'd just go 'round an' talk to people. He an' Alejandro they had a big hacienda up-country, the one the Bigelow Company controls now, Ojo de Agua is the name of it. Félipe let Alejandro run it to suit himself, an' he'd go 'round the country about like a common nigger, and just talk to people.

"He'd meet a feller in the road, and squat down on his heels and smoke a cigaret with him, and get the idea in his head so's 'twould stay, or he'd work with them, anything so's to get a chance to talk to 'em, one at a time. Before they's got wise to him he'd talked to pretty near every man in Aguaclara except the army and them that was in the Government. He'd turn up at Ojo de Agua every once in a while an' get a handful of pesetas an' go off again.

"Alejandro was makin' money hand over fist. Félipe never seemed to understand what Alejandro was like. He used to try to get him into the game. He talked kind of patient about him, like he was a boy that couldn't learn but he had hopes of him. Then they put him in jail, and Alejandro got a job at the national palace or whatever they call it, to show which side he was on."

"Why didn't they shoot Félipe?" I asked.

"I don't rightly know, but I have a notion that was Alejandro's game," said the captain. "He wasn't right sure which was goin' to win, so he tried to play both sides. At last he thought he had it all figured out. He got word from that man that claimed to represent the French interests—you know who I mean."

He waved his cigar at the purser.

"Lamouche," said the purser.

"Yes," the captain went on, "Lamouche had it that the French would finance the thing for concessions from the Government, and Alejandro was to be President. Alejandro would declare for the liberty party and he would be jailed, and both he and Félipe would be taken out to be shot. When they were led out, the army would come over to them, Alejandro would take command, and they would march on Boca del Rio. Alejandro told me about it the day he came to the jail. He wanted me to take command of the old river gunboat they had then, and come down-river with the army, an' be an admiral.

"He didn't tell that to Félipe. He just said that he had come 'round to his way of thinking. Félipe took it more or less as a matter of course. Seemed to think any man would jump in on the losing side if he thought it was right. Even when Alejandro was brought back to jail the next day, and the both of 'em were told they were going to be shot next morning, Félipe never turned a hair. He was glad Alejandro had seen what was right—the only thing he seemed to be sorry about was that they couldn't do any more work for the cause.

"Of course Alejandro pretended to feel the same way. He didn't think he was going to get shot. But they shot him just the same."

The captain snapped his cigar butt over the rail with his forefinger, and chuckled.

"They shot the both of 'em," he continued, stretching his arms above his head. "I suppose Alejandro thought up to the moment the bullets struck him that Lamouche would be along with the army."

"Where was Lamouche?" I asked.

"I don't know. I s'pose he was only foolin' with Alejandro anyhow—or maybe he wanted to get him out of the way."

I threw my cigar after the captain's.

"I don't see that either of them did much liberating," I remarked.

"That happened the next day," said the captain. "All the men that Félipe had talked to, about all the men in Aguaclara, came whooping in and spanked the army and took their guns away. They let us all out of jail. I got hold of a machete, and we came swarming down to Boca like a bunch of hornets. My God, the things they did to that captain-general—I saw the whole business. That was one —— of a little revolution. We don't have 'em like that now."

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For the Parson of Paradise

by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Alias Whispering White," "How Paradise Lost," etc.

ME AND Magpie Simpkins pilgrims into Paradise, ties our burro to a rack, and looks at the place from an unbiased standpoint. Paradise is a good little town—to look at; but she ain't no place to start something you ain't prepared to finish. A long time ago they changed the Sixth Commandment to read: Give him an even break—regardless of ability.

Over in front of the Ace Full saloon sets a lonely figure, which we decipher to be "Old Testament" Tilton. He was put on earth—or thinks he was—to save souls. He almost saved one. He prevailed upon "Sad" Semple to stop his wayward path, and the said Sad person listens attentive-like, and publicly hugs Old Testament.

Sad makes a date to meet Old Testament at the church, but I reckon that Sad got to thinking it over and decides that so long as he's going to slough all of his sins in a bundle he may as well be steeped, so he went over to Mike Pelly's saloon and played a dollar on the wheel.

He lost. Then he rises up and proclaims that, while the wheel is the invention of the devil, who ain't noways a visible target, some human being has been tampering with the mechanism, the same of which makes it a cinch instead of a gamble. Such remarks lead but to the grave, especially when directed at "Kid" Kelly, behind the wheel, so Old Testament's well chosen words are spoken over Sad instead of to him, and Old Testament lost his chance to put a brand on a lost sheep.

He sets there like an old buzzard, dressed in his rusty, split-tailed coat, with his shiny pants tucked into the tops of his short boots. He expectorates when he sees us, and straightens out one leg, with a convulsive jerk.

"Howdy, Testament," says Magpie. "How moves the world with you?"

"Howdy, Brother Magpie," says he, sad-like. "Howdy, Brother Ike. Spiritually, physically or financially? In spirit I am meek and mild, and physically I am able to nourish at such times as I can secure an excuse for mastication, but financially—by the butting bull of Bashan, I'm down to bedrock! Bedrock and no color! The Paradise church ain't paying no dividends. She couldn't pay *ono peso* on a dobie dollar, and you can't lead sheep on an empty stummick. The pastor of Paradise hath an empty pantry."

We sets down beside the old boy, and rolls smokes. Old Testament shifts his quarter-section of spitting-weed, and hits a lizard dead center.

"The women of my church tried to give a sociable to raise a few dollars, but she wasn't a success," he announces. "'Weinie' Lopp was the first one there, and he ate six scoops

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of ice-cream. Yeap! Mighty nigh died of cramps, and while we're resuscitating him they forgot to cover the freezer, and the whole mess melted. Netted one dollar and four-bits."

"Which don't scare no wolf from the wickiup," observes Magpie. "Ain't there no way you can get the money?"

"Yea, verily, I might turn highwayman," observes the old boy, squinting at his toes. "I pray daily for relief."

"And set here in the sun and wait," says Magpie, slipping a five-dollar bill into the old boy's pocket. "You're a lot like other praying folks I've knowed, Testament. Your pack is full of trust but your ability has leaked out a long ways down the trail. You're handy for funerals and marriages, but outside of that—I ain't got nothing against you, you understand. I ain't going to condemn no man, Testament, but I will say this much to you. There ain't no use in asking the Lord to get you things that you can go out and get for yourself. *Sabe* what I mean?"

We ambles over to Mike Pelly's saloon, and left Old Testament there on the walk, nodding to himself.

We sure runs into a confab in that den of iniquity. The center of interest is a stranger to us. He's about as tall as Magpie, and if anything he's thinner, which is speaking of the top notes of a fiddle. He's got a shiny stove-pipe hat on his mop of gray hair, and he's got a nose that looks like forty below zero. I'd also like to state that he's got a voice. Man, he don't talk—he roars. Me and Magpie stops in the doorway, and waits for somebody to kill him.

"Ha!" he rumbles, tapping himself on the chest. "Booth! Barrett! Who were they? I ask you—who were they?"

"I'll bite," says "Ricky" Henderson. "Who were they?"

He don't answer. He glares at Ricky, and Mike Pelly slips his riot-gun over the edge of the bar.

"Egad!" he roars. "When I, John McBeth, played *King Lear* the hirelings of the press crawled at my feet for the scanty interviews I might condescend to give. My autograph sold at auction! The autographs of the king of tragedy.

"What am I doing here? Why do I desert—yea, abandon—the call of Mammon and the glittering paths which I so lately trod? Why do I hide in obscurity while the populace clamor my name? I'll tell you why. You are the cause. Ye who have never heard my name. I come to you with my wonderful reputation and repertoire, that those of you who are isolated may taste of the tales of the Bard of Avon. My art is great but my love for my fellow man is greater. I thirst."

Mike sets out the bottle, and this actor person shows us that his last remark was no idle bit of conversation. Mike sighs deep-like, and fills the bottle again.

"When do you show?" asks "Telescope" Tolliver, of the Cross J ranch.

"Sho-o-o-o-ow?" He runs from a low note to a high one, and when he finishes his nose is pointed dead on the ridgepole.

"That was the question," admits Telescope. "We want to know when to come, and under what auspices it is to be held. Down at Silver Bend they mostly always put 'em under the auspices of some strong organization. We ain't got no lodges here, and our strongest organization is the Vigilance Committee. How would that suit you?"

"This one will be under the auspices of the Baptist Church," states Magpie.

"Chur-r-r-rch?" roars the tragedian. "Chur-r-r-rch?"

"Beyond the shadow of a single, solitary doubt," agrees Magpie. "You and the church splits the purse fifty-fifty. *Sabe?*"

"That's some good idea," applauds "Chuck" Warner, another Cross J puncher, who can wiggle both ears like a mule. "What for kind of a play have you got, mister, what will be suitable for a church auspices? Something dignified and not gaudy but appropriate and entertaining."

"Shades of Hamlet!" he grunts. "Fifty-fifty with a church! Egad, we might play 'Ben-Hur.' But stay! I have no troupe. I am alone—alo-o-o-one. Again I thirst."

"We've got a lot of talent around here," says Henry Peck, "I play a banjo, and me and Chuck and Telescope and 'Muley' Bowles can sing 'Sweet Adeline,' all four to once. She sounds great."

"I doubt me not," growls McBeth, looking longingly at Mike. "'Ben-Hur' requires a large cast, and the trappings of Biblical times. I can not even think of such an undertaking."

"Take your own time," says Magpie. "We'll wait while you think. No think—no drink. *Sabe?*"

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The old spav does a lot of thinking right there, and then:

"Art willing to help me? Help me? Gadzooks! The talent of the world would rally to my call, and now I have to beg for assistance. Ah, well, I will do it. Now I thirst anew."

To see that old pelican drink you'd bet he was a desert from his wisdom teeth to his heels. Magpie gets enthused over the old rumbler, but I can't seem to appreciate his talents. Magpie tells me that I ain't got no art in my soul, and, not knowing just what constitutes art and souls, I'm forced to agree with him.

I FINDS "Dirty Shirt" Jones enjoying a siesta in the Ace Full, so I pulls his chair out from under him and drags him to the bar. We gets reminiscent and gladsome, and he invites me to visit at his shack.

"To spend the week-end, Ike," says he.

"Which end is that?" I asks.

"You know your own physical failings better than I do," says he. "I read that in a book, Ike. What do you answer?"

"Me? I'll spend both ends with you, Dirty. Magpie has hooked up with the King of Tragedy, who goeth fifty-fifty with a church, and he won't be of no use as a pardner until it's over, and some good folks are dead."

"Your conversation is clear as Yallerstone water."

"Meaning that Paradise is going to have a show. Tragedy comes to us, with a stovepipe hat and a painted nose, and opines to enlighten us. He loves his feller man, Dirty Shirt. Ain't he a wonder? He cometh with a reputation, repertoire and a roaring thirst. His voice sounds like a load of barrels going over a wooden bridge."

"The name of said show is?"

" 'Been Here.' "

"Before?"

" 'Been Here.' "

"Not since 1895," declares Dirty. "The first one we had was 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' and the last one was a return engagement of the same show, and there ain't been nothing in between."

" 'Ben-Hur,' " corrects "Slim" Hawkins, from the doorway. "Some show, believeth me. I'm going to take a part."

"Then believeth me, I'm not coming," says Dirty. "Them there home talentless things ain't no good. Pay two dollars and four bits for a chance to get killed. Not me!"

The crowd drifts in from Mike's, and the play is the topic of conversation.

"This will mark an epoch on local theatricals," states Muley Bowles, who speaks in rhyme and gets weighed on the hay-scales. "This here is a religious theme, and will uplift the community."

"You *sabe* this here play by heart?" asks Dirty Shirt.

"Not me," grins Muley. "I ain't no forecaster. It ain't been wrote yet. Somebody wrote it once, and this here famous actor knows a little of it, but he's going to write what he can't remember. He told us a little of it, and she listens like tinkling brooks."

"I'm helping him," states Magpie, important-like. "I know quite a lot about such things, and him and me can sure lay out an entertainment that will make you set up."

"Well," says Dirty Shirt, "a while ago I remarked that I won't come, but I'd sure admire to see anything that Magpie had a hand in. It will likely give somebody an excuse to kill somebody else. I'll come."

"Mike Pelly said he'd donate the opery house," states Ricky. "Wonder if we can get old man Thatcher to bring his orchestra?"

"We can," says Swede Johnson. "He'll come. He's got a new bull fiddle that he wants to try out. Four in his orchestra now. His boy plays the squeeze organ, and old 'Calamity' Clakins can just about blow the keys out of a mouth harp. And last but not least is 'Froggy' Deschamps. He sure can make that jew's-harp talk."

"Sounds to me like a Piegan with the hay fever having nightmare through his nose," says Dirty, disgusted-like. "Sounds awful, Ike."

"You two ain't got no love of music no way," says Magpie. "You can't appreciate the tender things of life. You won't appreciate a Biblical tragedy, so you may as well not come."

"What kind of a show is this?" asks Dirty.

" 'Ben-Hur,' " states Magpie, wise-like. " 'Ben-Hur' is a story of things what happened before the spinx was built. Know what the spinx was, Dirty?"

"Sure. Which one are you referring to, Magpie?"

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"The one what was built in Greece."

"Oh, that one," says Dirty, relieved. "Now I *sabe*. You're so vague about things, Magpie, that a feller has to question. Never mind explaining any more, 'cause I *sabe* the drift of the thing now."

Old Testament is still setting in the same place, so me and Dirty stops to break the gladsome news.

"Testament, good times are coming," says I. "They're going to play 'Ben-Hur' for you."

He squints up at us—

"Name of a race-hoss, piece of music or a gambling device?"

"None such," replied Dirty. "This is a play show. *Sabe?* A certain tragic person is going to produce some results, and you get half what he acquires."

"Huh!" grunts the old boy, thinking it over. "I *sabe*, brother. If he gets sixty days in jail I get thirty. Why multiply my misfortunes?"

"Be meek," advises Dirty. "The meek shall inherit the earth."

Old Testament shifts his chew, and nods:

"Eventually, but not yet. When doth this play attempt to happen?"

"It is now under construction," says I. "Being made to Paradise's measure."

"I hope she will fit," says Testament, earnest-like, "I hope she fits."

"She will be a fit," assures Dirty. "Apoplectic, paryletic—some kind."

Me and Dirty don't show up in Paradise until the next afternoon. Mike's place is closed, and so is the Ace Full. We sets down on the sidewalk, and wonders, like *Rip Van Winkle*, how long we been asleep. Pretty soon we hears a noise up in the opery house, over the Ace Full, so we climbs the squeaky stairs, and looks in.

Looks like a political rally. About all the male population for ten miles around are grouped around the stage, upon which sets Magpie and John McBeth. McBeth is discoursing thusly:

"*Ben-Hur* was a Jew. He——"

"I'll take that part," says Slim Hawkins, standing up. "Me and Sam Rosenstein punched cows together in Custer County, and I *sabe* the type. He beat me out of a saddle and——"

"Silence!" roars McBeth. "*Ben-Hur* was a noble Jew."

"Sam was a Russian one," says Slim, apologetic-like. "I'd love to——"

"Slim, you set down," says Magpie. "This here astute tragedian is explaining as we proceed. You stay down or I'll come down there and nail your chaps to the chair."

"I suppose you picked that part for yourself, eh?" says Slim.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Pete Gonyer, of Piperock, and Magpie rises up.

"You're all through laughing, Pete," proclaims Magpie. "Go ahead with the tale, John."

"Good breeding is rare," says McBeth. "A fool laughs when wise——"

"Shut up!" yelps Magpie. "You cut out the comment, and explain the show. Most of these men are strangers to you, and you don't realize how close to the cemetery you're riding. Me—I know them well enough to shoot at the right time, but I've got to save you until the church gets its split. *Sabe?*"

"What I wish to know is this," says Chuck Warner. "Is this here to be a stag show? Ain't none of the gentle sex included?"

"What do you think this is—a honkatonk?" yelps Magpie. "Go ahead, John."

"*Ben-Hur* accidentally knocked a brick off the top of his house, and it hit the new governor on the head. The soldiers get him, and cast him into a galley, where he is chained to an oar for years."

"I'll throw a brick," whoops "Mighty" Jones. "But I won't pack no oar. Who is the one what gets hit? Pick some of that Seven A bunch."

Magpie stretches out his long legs, and shifts his gun:

"Go ahead, Mr. McBeth. I ain't got no brick, but the light is fairly good. Go ahead."

"*Messala* is the heavy," states McBeth, nervous-like. "He's a bitter enemy of *Ben-Hur*, and——"

"I vote for Muley," yelps Telescope Tolliver, "he's the heaviest thing around here, and he can hate anybody like ——!"

"I'll be *Ben-Hur*," whoops Weinie Lopp. "I'd love to have Muley hate me."

"I quit!" roars McBeth, throwing his paper on the floor. "Ye gods! In all my years before the footlights I never had less attention. Shade of General Lew Wallace —I quit!"

"After the church gets its half," says Magpie. "Remember the love you hold for your feller men."

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"R-r-r-r-ruff!" he roars, shaking his mane like a buffalo bull. "It is an insult to my intelligence! Be it so. I proceed. As I said before, *Ben-Hur* ——"

"*Messaly*," corrects "Doughgod" Smith. "You told us all about *Ben-Hur*."

"Ike," says Dirty, "this conversation will lead to homicide. Let's me and you keep our skirts clean. Eh?"

"There is wisdom in your words," says I, and we went out of there.

DIRTY SHIRT has got some stuff at his mine what has to be hauled in, so we spends a couple of days away from the flesh-pots.

And it came to pass, as they used to say in olden times, that when me and Dirty Shirt again come into Paradise we first meets Old Testament. He seems shy on enthusiasm, and makes figures in the sand with his toe.

"How goes the auspices?" I asks, and he shakes his head.

"Verily, it is no better," says he. "Strife is rampant. Art Miller took a shot at Magpie Simpkins last night. Deplorable—missed him. John McBeth is in jail, and tonight the play is due."

"They got the King of Tragedy in jail?" I asks. "What's he done?"

"Tried to escape. Said he was afraid of the outcome. They put him in jail until show-time. We've sold five hundred dollars' worth of chairs."

We congratulate Old Testament, and pilgrims on up-town. Art Miller is crossing the street, so we asks him where Magpie is.

Art glares at us, and then explodes:

"That hawg? That grasping goof?"

"The same," says I. "Do I get a reply?"

Art gnawed the ends of his mustache for a moment, and then:

"Him and that cross between a pole-cat and a pail of leaf-lard are up in Selby's old cabin, I reckon."

"Him and Muley?" asks Dirty, and Art nods.

"You *sabe* the description."

We pilgrims up to the old cabin, and sets down on the porch. The door is closed, but through the open window comes this conversation:

"Gadzooks! I would'st fain bust thee over the head with my saber, *Messaly*."

"Pshaw! You would so? Thinkest thou could'st bust mine helmet, *Bennie?*"

"You ain't got no helmet, Muley, and them ain't the lines no ways. From now on I wears my leather cuffs. Dog-gone, I sure have lost some skin!"

We hears the rumble of vocal cords for a minute, and then Muley's voice:

"Let's do that race scene over again, Magpie. That's the part what will make the big hit. Now you ain't supposed to be here. *Sabe?* Now watch me. I sees the bill of fare on the wall. Now I saunter up, clanking my sword, and now I'm reading. See? Now I turn, and look a heap like I smell onions. Now I speak to *Simonides: 'Ben-Hur?* That Jew? Impossible. It says here that he's going to herd three broncs in this race. Ha, ha! Drive? Why he couldn't herd a cow down a lane.' "

"That don't need rehearsing, Muley," says Magpie. "You get too danged enthusiastic over that part. Why don't you get animated over me carving you up with the sword? This ain't no comical show, Muley, and you ain't no actor, if you asks me. I'll show you real art. Here's how I act after I beats you out in that race. I walk over to you like this, and I say: 'What ho, you big goof! You fat——"

"Aw, hang on to yourself, Magpie! The word fat ain't used. *Sabe?* That word is silent and superfluous. I don't *sabe* the word goof, so I'll pass that. Now, go ahead."

"What ho, you big fat goof! You——"

"Aw ——!" groans Muley. "What if I am plump? You don't need to dilate on it, do you? You get mean in your remarks. I wish that me and Art could have played together."

"You and Art? Art couldn't play a hand of poker. He'd make a fine *Ben-Hur*."

"Well," says Muley, "he's a gentleman, anyway."

"Which would leave you right where you are now," says Magpie, and then there is silence for a while.

"Some job getting the livestock up there," opines Magpie.

"Some race-track," says Muley. "Pete's some carpenter. Windmill."

"Treadmill," corrects Magpie. "We'll sure do well on this show. Or rather, the church will do well."

"Old Testament will," says Dirty to me. "He gets five dollars for a funeral, and unless I'm mistaken he'll work over-time,

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Ike. I'll buy a ticket—in the back of the room. How about you, Ike?"

"Me? I'll prospect the roof for knot-holes first, Dirty."

We pilgrims down-town and has a drink, but there seems to be sort of a strained feeling about the place, so we goes home. After a while Magpie limps down our way, and sets down on the steps.

"You fellers don't show much public spirit," he states. "Why don't you help us a little?"

"We're neutral, Magpie," says Dirty. "When do you have your show?"

"It ain't my show," says he. "While I'm taking the star part it ain't noways to be known to posterity as my show. It will surprise you, though."

"I'll take a gun," opines Dirty. "You may surprise me, Magpie, but you ain't going to bushwhack Mr. Jones' favorite son."

"Everybody satisfied with their part?" I asks.

"Them what have them are," says he, sad-like. "A certain amount of dissatisfaction is apparent. Art Miller and Pete Gonyer both wanted to play the star part, and now they're sore. Pete McCall and Weinie Lopp wanted to be *Messaly*, and they're put out a lot. Human nature is a queer thing. Want to hear me recite some of my part?"

"We bought two seats at two dollars and four-bits per each," says Dirty Shirt. "If you'll hand us back that five dollars we'll set and listen to you recite. I'd rather see the show."

"You won't regret it, Dirty," says Magpie. "You sure won't."

"Nope. A dead man has no regrets, and if I get out safe I'll be so darn happy that I won't take time to regret, Magpie. I wish you a pleasant voyage—you and your oar."

I'D SAY that everybody in Yaller Rock County was inside them four walls when me and Dirty Shirt squeaks down the aisle. A lot of folks must have been shy, 'cause front seats are all we can get, and right behind us are "Yuma" Yates and "Pug" Peters, two mean *hombres* from over on the Little Snake. They're hairy, loud in their remarks, and exhales odors of alcohol.

Nailed to one side of the stage is this proclamation:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN LEAVE YOUR GUNS OUTSIDE JOHN McBETH WRITES AND PRESENTS TO YOU

BEN-HUR

A DRAMATIC BIBLICAL DRAMA

THEM WHO TAKE PARTS ARE

Simonides, a merchant . . . JOHN MCBETH
Ben-Hur, a Jew . . . MAGPIE SIMPKINS
Messala, a villain . . . LEMUEL BOWLES
Sheik Ilderim, a Arab . . JUDGE STEELE
Esther, a woman . . . ANNIE MUDGETT
Soldiers, livestock, etc.

ACT 1—A housetop in Venice.
ACT 2—*Simonides'* parlor near a race-track.
ACT 3—A Roman chariot-race.
ACT 4—The Arena, where *Simonides* kills *Ben-Hur* and *Messala* in combat before *King Herod*. *King Herod* is out of sight.

Music by Thatcher's orchestra. Overture is a jew's-harp solo, "Poet and Phesant," by Jean Baptiste Deschamps. Songs will likely be sung between acts by the Cross J Quartette.

Me and Dirty Shirt deciphers all this, and wonders exceedingly.

"Listens like a regular show, Ike," says Dirty.

"Better be," states Yuma. "We paid to see something."

"That's whatever, Yuma," agrees Pug. "She better be."

"You snake-hunters wouldn't know the difference anyway," says Dirty.

"Any man what ever roamed them Snake Hills wouldn't *sabe* anything entertaining less than murder or a lynching. Why don't some folks wash up a little, I wonder. You smell anything from back there, Ike?"

"Them is fighting remarks in our country, old-timer," warns Yuma.

"Do I have to go back there with you?" asks Dirty, sarcastic-like, but I takes him by the arm, and tries to pacify him.

"Don't quarrel with them ant-eaters, Dirty," says I. "They're unclean."

"You mean them words?" inquires Yuma.

"Who's talking to you?" I asks. "It shows darn poor taste to listen to a private conversation. Lean back and shut up!"

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Just then old man Thatcher stands up, bites off a fresh chew, waves his bow, and the solo starts. Ever hear classical music on a jew's-harp? Frenchy leans back in his chair, and groans and twangs like a busted guitar. Yuma and Pug crouches down over the backs of our chairs, and stares at Frenchy.

"My ——!" explodes Yuma. "What in —— is the matter with him?"

"Set down!" yelps Dirty. "What do you think he's playing—'Stars and Stripes'?"

"Playing?" asks Yuma, in a hoarse whisper. "Playing ——! He's dying!"

O-o-o-o-om-m-m-m — twang, twang, twung — e-eeng, zung, twung, twang, tum-m-m-m, goes Frenchy. *Tum-m-m-m, twang, twing, twum-m-m-m.*

Bang!

I got the hair burnt off the back of my neck, when Yuma's gun busts near my off ear, and then I slides deep into my chair. I looks at the orchestra, and observes old man Thatcher, with his bow held high, looking at Frenchy, who is staring at his cupped hands. Thatcher's boy is on the floor, with his squeeze organ shielding his face, while Calamity Clakins is backed up against the stage, with his harp between his teeth and a gun in each hand. He breathes deep-like, and gets a few discords out of that mouth-harp.

"By gar, she's gone!" yelps Frenchy. "Jus' whan I get going fine she went away."

"Good shooting, Yuma," applauds Pug. "A six-gun beats forceps every time. I don't know how you picked the right tooth, though."

"Give me that gun, Yuma," demands Bill McFee, the sheriff, coming down the aisle, and Yuma hands it to him.

After Bill went back I saw Pug give Yuma one of his.

"Next man what shoots any of the orchestra is going to get put out," announces Bill from the back of the hall. "They ain't charging us a thing for their services, so it ain't no killing matter. I'll sure boot any man what throws lead at them again."

Yuma stands up and faces Bill.

"Was that part of the orchestra, Bill?" he asks.

"It was!" snaps Bill. "You ruined the jew's-harp, Yuma Yates!"

"——!" says Yuma, apologetic-like. "My mistake, Bill; I thought he was French."

Then the curtain parts and out comes Old Testament. He gives us the peace sign and clears his throat.

"Brothern and sisters," says he. "Man came from dust and to dust he returneth back. We are gathered together here this evening on a solemn—we are here togethered this evening to-to-to——"

"Cow on the track," whispered Yuma.

"To withstand the—to commemorate the —the—to take part in the——"

"Write it out and mail it to us," suggests Dirty Shirt.

Old Testament loosens his collar, and walks to the other end of the stage.

"We are gathered together here this evening to-to-to-to——"

"Clear board!" yelps "Skinny" Skelton, a brakeman from Silver Bend, but Old Testament merely looks sad-like at Skinny, and continues:

"In behalf of the Baptist Church I am glad to see so many smiling faces here together. I am——"

Just then the curtain went up, and Testament has to hop out of sight.

She sure is something for to look at. They've got things built up so it looks like the roof of a shack, and up there, sitting on beer kegs, is Scenery Sims and Annie Mudgett, and beside them, looking over the edge, is Magpie Simpkins.

Man, he's a sight. He's got on red flannel underclothes, with a short skirt covered with red polka dots. His skinny legs are encased in a pair of well-greased boots, and on his head is a little, flat derby hat, which sets on the tops of his ears. Around his waist is strapped old J. B. Whittaker's Civil War saber.

Scenery is wearing an old Grand Army suit, with a feather in his hat, and in one hand he holds an old flint-lock pistol. Annie Mudgett, who looks like Miss Democracy, has got on a long cheese-cloth robe, and a veil which fits up under her long nose.

"They come!" squeaks Scenery, poking behind him with his pistol, and keeping his eyes on the crowd in front. "Here comes the governor!"

Magpie sticks out his chest, and struts to the edge, where he picks up a brick. We can hear a lot of noise, like folks cheering, and then Magpie heaves the brick. The roar of voices seems to get louder, and then a burst of profanity assails our ears.

"You danged red-legged pelican!" whoops

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a voice, and here comes Ricky Henderson, leading a burro.

The gore is running down one side of his face, and he leads that burro right on to the roof.

"You hunk of limburger!" yelps Ricky. "Where did you aim to throw that brick?"

"Shot at the governor and hit the mule-skinner!" whoops Yuma.

"Take that burro off this roof!" squeaks Scenery, poking at Ricky with that antiquated gun. "Take it back! What do you think you're leading — a canary bird?"

"Gadzooks!" roars Magpie. "Get thee hence, varlet! Tell the soldiers to come and take me to the oar."

"Fly that jassack off this roof or I'll throw you off," screeches Scenery, and Ricky leads the animal away.

"Some show, eh?" chuckles Pug. "That's good acting."

"Oh, oh, oho, oho, oh, oh!" howls Miss Mudgett, with her nose in the air, like a coyote objecting to the moon. "Oh, they'll take you away, *Bennie*, and it was all an accident."

"Fear ye not," consoles Magpie, twisting his mustache. "My soul is greater than their punishment."

Just then in comes Ren Merton and Doughgod Smith. Ren is wearing a bear-skin overcoat, and a derby with the brim cut off, and Doughgod is wearing an old lodge uniform. They've both got spears fifteen feet long. They surrounds Magpie, and marches him right off over the edge of the roof.

"Farewell," yelps Magpie. "I go to row a boat for a while."

"*Adios*," howls Yuma, standing up in his chair. "I hope somebody rocks the boat."

Then the curtain goes down and the orchestra hands us "Sweet Marie."

"THAT was some start, if you asks me," opines Dirty Shirt, rolling a smoke.

"Worst music I ever heard," growls Yuma, and Dirty turns around.

"You ain't tied there, are you?" he asks. "Go home if you don't like it."

Before Yuma can reply Magpie comes out in front of the curtain. He stops, and holds up his hand for silence.

"Get shipwrecked already?" yelps Buck Masterson.

"Hey, Bill! Bill McFee!" yells Magpie, and Bill answers from the back of the room—

"What do you want, Magpie?"

"Say, Bill, where is *Simonides?*"

"My ——!" wails Bill. "I forgot to let him out of jail!"

He lopes out of the hall. Magpie holds up his hand again, and when everybody stops making a noise, he announces that the Cross J quartet will render a selection.

"Is it absolutely necessary, Magpie?" inquires Zeb Abernathy.

"Almost unavoidable, Zeb," assures Magpie, "we've got to kill time."

"I hope that will be all," says Zeb, and then out comes Chuck, Telescope, Hen and Muley.

The first three are dressed in Sunday clothes. But Muley is putting on a little dog, if you ask me.

He's got a little skirt like Magpie has, and pink underclothes that sort of look a little shameless. Over one shoulder, and draped down the front of him is a bob-cat skin. His feet are encased in a pair of shiny leather shoes, and he's got a strip of red ribbon bound around his manly head, with the streamers hanging out behind.

There is considerable applause and comment when they appear, and Yuma begins to whistle that selection from the "Streets of Cairo," through his teeth. Dirty stands up and faces Yuma.

"Mister Yates," says he. "You stuff that whistle in your throat! If you wasn't evil-minded you wouldn't think of anything wrong. Stop it!"

"Ain't it going to dance?" asks Yuma, sad-like.

"Sing," states Dirty, and just then they begins. Muley and Chuck begins on "The Holy City," Telescope and Hen hits the high notes of "Sweet Adeline," and the orchestra drills into "Sweet Marie."

"I hate a liar," yelps Yuma, in Dirty's ear. "I hate a liar!"

"My mistake, Yuma," yelps Dirty. "I've been misled."

Just then here comes Bill McFee and John McBeth, and the music stops. The quartet sees a chance to duck, and they sure did.

"Who's the horse-thief that Bill's got?" asks Pug, as they slides past one end of the curtain.

"He's the *hombre* what started this show," says I. "He's a eminent tragedian."

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"He's got something to answer for," says Pug. "I hereby apologize to all decent horse-thieves."

We don't have to wait long for the next act, which discloses Muley and Ricky Henderson sitting there in chairs. Ricky has got a bandage on his manly brow. There's a rocking-chair, with a bearskin on it, and a table with some books and things to make it look homelike.

"Dost know aught of this *Ben-Hur?*" asks Muley.

"Yeah," says Ricky, rolling a cigaret. "He's a mean jasper, *Messaly*. I wouldst—wouldst—wouldst——"

"Fain," prompts Muley.

"Wouldst fain see thou stick him in the vittles, Messaly."

"Vitals," corrects Muley. "Vittles are grub."

"Vitals," says Ricky. "Vittles are grub."

Just then cometh John McBeth. He's got a long, red robe around him, and draped over his left arm. He comes in, dragging his feet, and scowling.

"What ho, *Messala!*" he roars. "How goeth things in Rome?"

"Fine and dandy," says Muley. "How is things with you? What do you know about this *Ben-Hur*, the noble Jew?"

"*Ben-Hur-r-r-r-r?* The Jew who was lately released from the galley, after accidentally dropping a tile on the governor?"

"That's him, old-timer," says Ricky, "only you used the wrong word and the wrong person. Accident ——!"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Yuma. "This is better than a honkatonk."

Just then Magpie strolls in. Him and Muley glares at each other, and Magpie turns to McBeth:

"Howdy, *Simonides*. How's all your folks?"

"Art thou *Ben-Hur-r-r-r*, the Jew?" thunders *Simonides*.

"Art," agrees Magpie, patting himself on the chest. "Sure art."

Muley walks over across the stage, and looks at a paper on the wall.

"Gadzooks!" he yelps. "Impossible! Look ye!"

"Im-m-m-mpossible?" roars *Simonides*. "What is im-m-m-m-possible?"

"It says that *Ben-Hur* will drive in the chariot-race. That Jew? Why he couldn't herd a cow down a ——"

"Whoa!" whoops Magpie. "Them ain't your lines, Muley. You lay off that kind of talk or I'll bust your nervous system into smithereens. *Sabe?* I can drive a lot better than you can, you fat——"

"Peace!" howls *Simonides*. "Peace!"

"Peace ——!" whoops Muley, hauling out his cleaver. "Have at you, *Ben-Hur!*"

"Same to you and many of them!" yells Magpie, hauling out his saber, and right then they goes seeking for gore.

They circles like a pair of wolves, and then rushes.

Something goes wrong. They're on opposite sides of the stage when they makes the grand rush, and they can't get no closer. Both of them are running as fast as they can, and it sort of makes me sea-sick. The carpet gets kicked to one side, and *Simonides* dives right out through the wall. Ricky starts to run between them but his feet try to hit him in the ear, and he pinwheels out of sight.

Out from the other side comes old Judge Steele, dignified as an owl in his flowing white robes. He don't get far when the phenomenon gets him too, and he ends up over a chair, with his bare feet waving in the air.

"Ye-e-e-eow!" whoops Yuma, standing up on his seat.

Bang! Bang!

He must have cut the rope what rolls the curtain, 'cause it drops down, and cuts off one remarkable sight. Mostly everybody is on their feet, yelling and throwing their hats around, but as soon as the curtain is down they quiet a bit. We hears some commotion behind the curtain, and Bill McFee stumbles out.

"Say, who fired them shots?" he whoops. "Who done it?"

"Yuma Yates," yells somebody, and Bill hops off the stage, and comes up to us.

"Give me that gun!" snaps Bill. "Look what you done—dang you!"

Bill turns around, and from his carcass comes the odors of alcohol.

"Look!" he roars. "Your darn lead busted that bottle on my hip, carroms off and stings the burro, and Old Testament got kicked plumb back into Proverbs. I'm going to put you Snake River toughs out of here. *Sabe?* Rise and travel!"

"Ho-o-o-o-ld fast! Whoa! Stay with 'em, Ricky! Whoa! Whoa!" yelps several

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voices behind the curtain. "Ye-e-e-ow! Let 'em go!"

Rip! Crash!

The curtain and half of the front of the stage comes out, and along with it comes John McBeth, old Judge Steele, Old Testament, and right with them is that burro. They lights in the aisle, and fights for a good running position. I think the burro got the rail.

I GLANCES back at the stage, and sees the feature act of the show. There is Magpie and Muley, each standing up on the front trucks of lumber wagons, to which shafts have been built, like breaking carts, and hitched to each one is a wild-eyed bronc, fighting for a chance to go some place and never come back again.

"Let her go!" yelps somebody, and they slacks up on the lines enough to let them buzzard-heads hit the floor.

Man, them broncs lit running, but they're in the same fix that Muley and Magpie were. They sure laid down to work, but don't get no place. Magpie and Muley are throwing the leather into them, and yelling like Comanches, and them broncs rattle their hoofs at forty miles an hour.

Everybody in the place is yelling and breaking up chairs. The candles along the front of the stage sets the ruined curtains on fire, and I seen "Swan River" Swanson hop from his seat and swing on to the big lamp in the middle of the room. Swan River was either trying to play safe or get a better look, which was all right and proper, but the lamp tore loose, and he comes right down on top of Bill McFee and Yuma Yates.

"Forty dollars on the roan!" whoops Pug, hopping up and down on my shoulders, "Forty to thirty that he——"

Crash! Bang! R-r-r-r-r-ip!

Somebody monkeyed with the wheels of progress. Them broncs seemed to take a toe-hold, and left their spots like a streak. I seen Muley turn over once on his way up beyond my vision. Magpie was leaning forward on his truck, and when his animal tore loose I seen him sail into the air like a big, red-legged crane, and turn end over end far out into the audience.

One bronc ripped off a corner of the stage, and I seen it hang up there for a moment, wheels spinning and bronc kicking. The other one shot right out over the orchestra, and stood on its head, with that truck standing on the ends of the shafts, and slowly falling toward me. I tried to saunter out of the way, but my foot got caught in a chair, and I bowed my head to the inevitable.

Darkness covered the land, and I slept. I dreamed that a centipede was using my cheek for a sidewalk, and I awoke to find Dirty Shirt's spur hooked under my off ear. I shoved his heel away, and looks around. Things seem sort of cramped to me, so I slips my head out from between the spokes of that chariot, and sizes things up better.

There's a couple of candles still burning on the stage, which gives us a little light. I sets down in a busted chair, and rubs some of the kinks out of my system.

Bill McFee and Yuma Yates are still locked in each other's embrace out where the aisle used to be, and as I look at them Yuma rolls loose and rubs his head. He looks at me, and then around the place.

"Who won?" he asks, in a hoarse whisper. "Who won?"

"Dead heat," I whispers, and he nods—"It's a miracle if they're not."

Chairs are squeehawed and busted all over the place, showing that folks didn't wait to march out. I hears a clump, and Muley falls out of a bunch of busted scenery near the roof. He's got a chair hung on one leg, and the breeching of a harness circles his neck. There's a look of perfect contentment on his fat face, as he bows to us, and recites:

> "The Summer sun was shining
> On a glacier gold and white,
> 'Round my old Kentucky home
> When I went away that night.
> I could hear the gophers singing
> In their nests among the trees
> And the moonshine came a stealing—
> Alcoholic on the breeze."

"That's good," says Yuma, awed-like, trying to clap his hands. "This is the first circus that I ever was at and stayed for the concert."

Muley walks right off the edge of the stage, and goes down in a heap. He don't no more than hit the floor until another apparition stands up. I'd opine that Froggy Deschamps has been kicked between the eyes, 'cause the upper half of his face sure is shaded. He nods to us, cups his hands around his mouth, and:

Twang-g-g-g, twum-m-m-m, tung-g-g-g-g, hong-g-g-g, hum-m-m-m, tum-m-m.

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"My ——!" grunts Yuma, staggering up the aisle. "Going home. Never knew this was a continuous performance."

He faded out of the door. Dirty Shirt sets up, and looks around. He cocks his ear to the music, and shakes his head, solemn-like.

"Ike," says he, "I dreamed that I was dead, and that the angels were playing harps. Do angels play jew's-harps?"

"We won't hear them, Dirty," says I. "Music won't bore us where we'll end up. Come on."

"Listen!" exclaims Dirty, and we pauses.

"One for you and one for me, one for you and one for me," drones a voice.

We weaves up to the back of the room. There in the doorway sets Old Testament, with a sack of dollars in his lap, and across from him, propped against the wall, is John McBeth. John's head is hanging on his chest, and his eyes are closed in sleep. The King of Tragedy is far from mundane things.

We stops to watch. Old Testament takes a dollar out of the sack, and lays it on John's robe, and then takes one for himself.

"One for you and one for me," he sings, and then fumbles into the sack again.

He don't even see us.

"One for you and one for me."

"Fifty-fifty—a—church," snores McBeth. "Shades—Lew Wallace."

"How did the church come out, Testament?" inquires Dirty.

Old Testament stops dealing for a moment, and squints up at us. He seems to sort of understand, but shakes his head:

"Two fiery steeds, one chariot and a multitude of people, but no church as yet," he replies, and starts in, "One for you and one for me."

Me and Dirty upsets the King of Tragedy as we goes out of the door, but Old Testament props him up again, and goes on dealing.

We stumbles down the busted stairs, and runs into a ghost.

"Salutations, Spook," says Dirty, and the apparition stops.

"I am *Sheik Ilderim*," it states. "I am a Arab, and I still have a part to play. They couldn't hold them broncs any longer."

"Go ahead and play it," says I. "You ain't got nothing on Froggy Deschamps, and Annie Mudgett. Why don't you three get together and play out the hand?"

We left him pondering the question, and pilgrims up the street. Seems like everybody is crowding the saloons or loading up to go home.

"Let us go over and see who got killed," suggests Dirty, but I shakes my head.

"Not me, Dirty. I've seen so much that my eyes ache. I'm going to get my burro, and go home. So-long, old-timer."

I HOBBLED down to Dirty's cabin and loaded my burro. I sort of hankers to get away from the bright lights, so I points the animal up the road. It is moonlight, and sudden-like I sees a figure ahead of me in the road. It sure looks fearsome in the dim light, so I halts my burro, and prepares for the worst.

"Advance, Ike Harper," says a hoarse voice, and I recognizes Magpie.

Beyond him is a figure setting in the dust.

"Greetings, noble Jew," says I. "I thought you were still in town, accepting the plaudits of the populace."

"I chased him," says Magpie, pointing at the figure in the road, which is slowly getting to its feet.

It is Pete McCall, the chunky little cross-eyed puncher from the Circle Star. He weaves around the road, talking to himself.

"Why chase poor little Pete?" I asks.

"He double-crossed me!" snaps Magpie, "He done me dirt."

"Never did," wails Pete. "Never did, Magpie. You told me to sneak under the stage and block Muley's whirligig, so his bronc goes to the bad, didn't you? Well, I never had a chance—dang you! When I crawled under there I found Art Miller and Pete Gonyer. They was drinking out of a bottle, and arguing which one of them things you're going to race on. They don't know, so they decides to shove a two-by-four into each, so as not to make any mistake. They said the whole thing was a fifty-fifty proposition, anyway."

Pete waddles off into the gloom, and we don't offer to molest him.

"Where you going, Ike?" asks Magpie, after a period of silence.

"Home. Old Testament said that we'll get our reward in Paradise, but I ain't going to wait. Piperock looks good to me, Magpie."

"I'll go with you, Ike. There may be a

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reward in Paradise for me, but it will likely read: 'Dead or Alive.' "

"In them clothes, Magpie?"

He looks down at his apparel, and scratches his head. He clanks his sword on a rock, and peers back at the lights of Paradise.

"Yeap. I left my pants and chaps at Bill McFee's, when I borrowed these red tights: I paid Mrs. Henderson to make this skirt, I traded hats with a harness drummer, and Whittaker's got my six-gun in place of this old cheese-knife. I'm splitting fifty-fifty with the world. Let's go home."

We plods along for a couple of miles, when Magpie stops, and turns to me.

"Ike," says he, "maybe things didn't work as per program, but I want you to understand that I didn't do all this for applause, reputation or filthy gain."

"No, Magpie," says I, "I never thought you did, 'cause you'd be hissed out of Yaller Rock County, broke like a dog and branded as a homicide. There might have been worse actors——"

" 'Ben-Hur' actors?" he asks.

But I don't reply, 'cause I've got to live with him.

THE AFRICAN AND THE MASSA

BY THOMAS S. MILLER

JUST what does the black think of the white who comes and lords it in his country? Does he regard him as a superior, does he bow to his science and inventions, as he sees them in steamers, railways—land canoes the blacks call them—guns, oil-lamps, clocks? One might surely expect an acknowledgment of our superiority from the barbarians of that strange and interesting part of the world so aptly designated Negroland—that land of many tribes and countless dialects that reaches from the Gold Coast to the hinterlands of Sokoto—one might surely expect an acknowledgment of our superiority from these people whose savage lot has been so ameliorated by the coming of the whites.

But one looks in vain for any such real acknowledgment. The blacks cringe before white man's inventions, and envy them, but do not marvel; are proud to possess a nickel watch, but have no conception of its ingenuity or recognition of a superior intellect in its inventors. I have often tried to tease such an admission from the blacks, but they sulked back within themselves and, as I afterward learned, in a curious conceit.

It was a gun-bearer who raised a small corner of the curtain which the natives interpose between their beliefs and superstitions and inner lives and the curiosity of the whites, before whom they feel much like children in the presence of grown-ups, are shy of revealing themselves, secretive, and fearful of being made fun of. In this rare instance my gun-bearer revealed a curious belief of the blacks, to wit, that the whites had been accidentally favored at creation and by a lucky accident had gotten possession of knowledge and thereby power. Thus in his quaint pidgin-English the gun-bearer narrated:

"In de beginning de good *ju-ju* (God) made de worl'. Firs' he make de firs' black man, den he make de firs' white man. Den he cal dat firs' black and dat firs' white and set befoh dem two calabashes. One dem calabashes hab de Book of Knowledge; de oder calabash hab all de good t'ings ob de worl'—de hunting forests, de ribber with de big fish, an' de nuts and fruits and rich lands. Bera well.

"De good *ju-ju* gib de black man firs' choice, and dat fool nigger done choose de calabash with de good t'ings. De white man, he got to take de Book ob Knowledge. Den what good dat black hab all de good t'ings when de white hab de Book of Knowledge what learn him to get gun and *tchuka-tchuka* (river launch) an' he come an' take de black's good t'ings?"

There it is. Innately conceited of themselves and their country, they jealously regard the whites as the lucky possessors of knowledge and power—magic—because of the foolish choice of the first black. They reason that if their country were not better than ours, we would not invade it and take its rubber and palm-oil, hides, spices, gums, nuts and send them over the "big water" to our own, which must be quite barren.

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The Dance of the Golden Gods

A Four-part Story, Part II

by Stephen Chalmers

Author of An "Admiral of the Line," "Chaplain to the Buccaneers," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

YOUNG Dickon Butshead stood in the back room of his uncle's goldsmith shop in Rat Lane and watched the wily old assayer take from the hands of his richly dressed patron some small pieces of gold and examine them closely.

"You say, Sir Walter," spoke the goldsmith, "that the other assayers all made a similar assay, reporting the same high bearing, and then all discovered a similar error at the same time, showing the ore worthless?"

"Even so," replied Raleigh bitterly. "I have mine enemies, who would show that I never reached the Guianas. Even have they bribed some of my crew to say that the gold came from Barbary."

Dickon, whose face was yet bronzed from his voyage as cabin-boy to Sir Walter on the *Whelp*, stepped forward eagerly.

"Here is one they can not bribe, Sir Walter," he cried.

But the lad's outburst won from the nobleman only a haughty stare.

The slight wounded Dickon's loyal heart sorely. All his love for his former master he felt turn to bitterness.

When Raleigh had gone, leaving his ore to be assayed, a sailor came furtively into the shop. "Bulkhead" Gorges had sailed on the *Whelp;* had been soundly flogged there for mutiny, in fact. And concerning the voyage he whispered a long time in the ear of Master Simons, the goldsmith.

"Give me but a ship with master and crew," he finished hoarsely. "I know where the mine is. Thou and I can be rich as the Khan of Tartary."

"But they said 'twas no true gold Raleigh brought back," reminded Simons.

"Trickery. They wish him to lose favor with the queen, that they may sail another expedition before him."

"Think you, then, there are those who would back such a venture?" asked Simons with a gleam in his eye.

"Aye," said Gorges, and the two whispered on.

ONE night there was a strange gathering in the back room of the shop in Rat Lane. Some were there who wished to see Raleigh in royal disfavor, and all lusted for the gold he had discovered. Much talk went on in low voices. Butshead read aloud from an old parchment the story of Juan Martinez, who had gone to the New World and found a golden city there. Then more talk, until all were agreed to hazard a secret expedition and purses were loosed to buy a ship.

Dickon Butshead, who had the story of Juan Martinez by heart, was to be mate, a rum-soaked navigator named Barbary was chosen captain, and Bulkhead Gorges was to find the crew.

Simons felt that Dickon's loyalty to his former master had been killed by Raleigh's cold words and haughty stare.

Forthwith, in accordance with the plot, Dickon was sent to tell Sir Walter that his ingots were but fool's gold. He found the nobleman in his lodgings with Taruma, a young Indian prince brought back from the New World.

Curtly the lad said that the ore was worthless. Raleigh bowed his head.

"Dickon, lad, mine enemies have beaten me," he said brokenly.

The grief of his old master was too much for the boy. He thrilled again with loyalty.

"They have not!" he cried, and told the whole story of the plotting. "But I sail with them," he finished, "and I shall fetch proof that Sir Walter Raleigh is no dreamer."

"Go then, lad," said Raleigh, "and God be with you."

ON THE tenth day of January, 1596, a ship called the *Fearless* put out to sea, carrying a nondescript crew lorded over by Bulkhead Gorges, Dickon Butshead as mate, and Captain Barbary, who was dead drunk.

On the fourth day out a stowaway was discovered. It was Taruma.

"Me sick inside for go home," he explained brokenly.

However, Butshead knew that Raleigh had sent him.

They sailed on. Gorges ruled the crew, showing openly his contempt for the drunken captain and the youthful mate, but avoiding, with the common sense that was not wanting in his make-up, any clash that might bring serious harm to the venture.

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Barbary, when he was sober, taught Dickon navigation. But he drank more and more. Then in a frantic clutch at his departing self-respect he denied his craving and abstained totally. Dickon found him one day singing softly to himself. The shock had been too great. Barbary had gone mad, and the ship was without a navigator.

Butshead told Gorges.

"No matter," said the sailor coolly. "We'll steer her by dead reckoning. No turning back now. Steady as she goes. We'll make land somewhere, as did the Italian. An happen it be not nigh our goal, we ha' the ship and all that's in her, which I choose against scurvy England and a pauper's fare!"

Dickon said nothing. He had little heart for venturing on without a navigator into the uncharted Atlantic; nor did he care to become an unwilling guest aboard a stolen ship, his original object in coming aboard defeated. He resolved to seize the first opportunity to head the ship for the nearest land. Some of the crew wished the same thing. Conspicuous among these was a long-headed Scot named Fergus. Him the young mate found at the wheel that night.

"The wind serves good for the Cape Verde Islands to the south," said Butshead. "Make her due south, then, and steady at that."

With a grunt Fergus obeyed.

CHAPTER VIII

COLUMBUS *REDIVIVUS*

ALL the rest of that night the *Fearless* flew like a bird due south and straight for the Cape Verde Islands, the wind serving from the northeast.

The change of course was undiscovered before morning. There was no moon to offer instant betrayal of the altered direction of the ship, and had any of the wine-fuddled crew thought to study the stars it is doubtful if, as the night wore on, they could have brought a single constellation into order or a single star into focus.

Once—but only once—Gorges came and looked at the compass. It may have happened that at that moment Fergus, giving answer to the boatswain's rather bibulous greeting, let the vessel fall away before the wind and swing a point or two westward. In any event Gorges contented himself with a snarling curse at the man's carelessness and went below again.

The man who came to relieve Fergus at eight bells in the first morning watch was a Sunderland fellow, Tillson by name, and fortunately he was one of those who had hung fire in the matter of Gorges' proposal to continue to Guiana despite all odds. Tillson eyed Fergus inquiringly as the Scot gave him the course.

"'Tis the order," added Fergus tersely.

Tillson said no more. He was not quite sure whether the command was that of Gorges, the mate Butshead, or the crazy captain. He was only glad for himself that the *Fearless* was heading for the nearest land as the wind served.

The vessel was still winging her way due south when the sun rose over the eastern rim of the sea. Tillson had still a portion of his trick at the wheel to serve. None of the crew appeared at sunup and there was no immediate necessity for their presence on deck. Butshead, weary-eyed from his long vigil, sat dozing on the poop-deck. At the cabin door stood Taruma, his ear trained on his patient, who was asleep in singing dreams inside. But the Indian's eye occasionally turned to the sun which was rising off the larboard beam instead of on the quarter, where it had come up on the previous morning.

It was Scroop, the first of the ship's company to emerge upon deck, who at once made note of the phenomenon and turned a suspicious eye upon the mate.

"How's she headin', Butshead?" he trumpeted through his hands.

Butshead stopped in the pacing by which he hoped to keep awake—the warming sun added to his sleepiness—and fixed a cold eye upon the man.

"Happen thou spoke to me?" said he, as if he had not heard aright. "Thou hast some need to mend thy address."

Scroop stared, then formed his slack mouth into a round O of mock surprize. His hand went to his forelock, which he pulled, at the same time bowing with deliberate mockery.

"Cravin' your lordship's mercy," said he, "I but spoke in my sleep. I' faith!" He stared again at the sun, blinked, passed a hand over his eyes and added—"I' faith, I do think I be a-dreamin' still."

With that he turned and dived into the forecastle.

"Stand by for trouble now!" muttered Butshead.

He looked at the man Tillson. He was but indirectly concerned in the matter. He had no reason to doubt the authority of the course he had received from Fergus. Taruma was standing by the cabin door, but Butshead looked for little help from him.

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For a moment he considered the advisability of summoning the captain. He had seemed sane enough in all but matters of hearing, but, that being so, he would fail to understand why the *Fearless* should be heading for the Cape Verde Islands. Even if, this morning, sleep had cleared his delusions quite away, he would still further fail to comprehend Butshead's action.

The development that he expected was somewhat slow of coming. There was some argument going on in the forecastle. He could hear the voices of men and the hoarse bellow of Gorges hurling anathema. Then came a sounding crash, a yell of rage and pain, and from the seamen's quarters there tumbled the Scotchman, Fergus, with blood streaming from a cut across his cheek. On his heels came Bulkhead Gorges with a drawn cutlas in his hand and raving like a maniac. Scroop, Tarry and the rest of the rascally company followed.

Paying no further attention to Fergus, who had fallen to the deck, clutching his face with both hands, Gorges came rushing aft, sprang up the ladder to the poop-deck and confronted Dickon Butshead with the drawn blade. The mate did not draw his own light weapon; it would have availed little against the ponderous steel and the physical strength of the boatswain; but he stood his ground with his arms folded across his chest.

"What trick is this, thou London rat!" roared Gorges. "She's headin' due south by the sun! Where art thou bound?"

"The Cape Verde Islands," replied Butshead coolly; "there to lay till such time as Cap'n Barbary is himself again."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n Butshead, but Cap'n Gorges is master here an' left no such orders. This ship is bound for Puerto de los Españoles, Trinidad; and there she be going, hell or hurricanes despite!"

"Not while I be in charge," said Butshead.

Gorges, almost losing control of himself, drew back his right arm. Butshead never moved, but a slow grin overspread his face. Gorges, amazed, stayed his intent and cast a nervous glance back over his shoulder. For a moment he thought the grin meant that he was trapped from behind. But only his own men were there.

Butshead was looking at them, too, studying the faces one by one. For the most part they expressed nothing, or nothing friendly toward Butshead; yet the mate fancied one or two of the men willing, had they not feared the majority, to take sides with him upon the matter of making the nearest land.

Gorges, no fool at his worst, fixed an eye on Scroop, then shot a glance at the man Tillson, at the wheel. Whether Tillson was on the mate's side, or had merely taken his course from Fergus, he could decide and reward later. For the present the mutineer ordered Scroop to the wheel and commanded Tillson to stand back with the other men. Tillson obeyed and retreated well to the rear of Gorges' crowd, who promised no good to him in their glances.

"Now, then, Scroop," cried Gorges, "swing her back upon the course. Stand by to square away, m'lads."

The grin on Butshead's face became more pronounced as Scroop spun the wheel and the men laid upon the ropes. Gorges glared suspiciously.

"Aye, aye," said Dickon. "What course do ye set, my master? Whither hither? Hither whither?"

Gorges' jaw seemed to slacken and drop. All at once he realized that to hold the whip-hand nominally was not all, that more mischief had been done than the mere losing of nigh six hours on the course. He tried to conceal his discomfiture, thinking hard, calculating, like a man who fears he is lost in a forest but will not admit it while he reflects on his meanderings in one direction and then another.

The course had been southwest from the Canaries. That first night and all the following day and up to midnight the *Fearless* had held steadily upon that course before a roaring breeze. What had she made? He had not thought, or dared perhaps, in Barbary's then poop-deck mood, to ask for the reckoning. A hundred leagues—two hundred—maybe more. He did not know. Then this trick of the mate and the south course before a breeze that was little less favorable. Six—seven hours, speeding due south.

HE COULD no longer conceal his dismay. He glared evilly at the grinning young mate and scratched his ear in the effort of calculation. He turned and looked at the sun, then at the vast-rimmed sea of silver-tinted purple. The horizon was absolutely unbroken.

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For a moment he thought to yield, at least to the extent of sighting the Cape Verde Islands and setting the Indies course from there.

But, without recourse to the further doubtful services of this antagonistic youth, could he even strike the islands? If the *Fearless* slipped by them, she would find herself aimlessly wandering in the ever-widening and unexplored regions of the South Atlantic, between the unknown coasts of Africa and the southern American continent. If, on the other hand, he held to his own course—southwest, where might the *Fearless* make landfall—now? He cursed outright as Butshead laughed in his face.

"Mayhap," said the mate, "ye would be king of some cannibal coast, Gorges, and provide provender for the pot, or vie wi' Magellan and, winding around the globe, ground at the back door of an English prison!"

All at once Gorges became cool. A light of shrewd decision came over his face. He grinned and looked at the men. They had done their work. All sail was drawing upon the southwest course again and the company was grouped around Tillson, questioning, threatening, while the man from Sunderland defended himself with outstretched arms and upturned palms.

"Come up here, m'lads!" roared Gorges.

The men bounded up the ladder to the poop-deck with alacrity, Butshead wondering what was to happen next.

"Lay on to him!" said Gorges, indicating the mate with a wave of his cutlass.

The men must have anticipated some such order, for before Busthead could make a move they had him down upon the deck, pinned hand and foot. Taruma, by the door of the cabin, never moved. He could do nothing.

At Gorges' order Butshead was lifted up and hurled into the cabin and the door shut. Bulkhead Gorges himself turned the key in the lock and said—

"Two cap'ns within an' one without—ha!"

His eye fell upon Taruma, standing like a bronze image draped with a jaguar skin.

"How fares Barbary, blackamoor?"

"*Acarcwana* soon die—maybe no," said Taruma. "Me watch."

"Marry, then," said Gorges with a brutal laugh, "he will die or will not die the quicker an thou keep watch from this side of the door till I say the word."

Then the mutineer went into the waist of the ship and set the men to work on the numerous odd jobs of deck, canvas and rope. He himself went below and returned later in a cheerier frame of mind. He was even generously inclined to good-fellowship, ordering a keg of liquor to be broached amidships. The weather was perfect. No sign of a change was visible or to be expected for days.

The ship required little handling, racing as she did before a wind that never altered in direction or force. The company of the *Fearless* were like luxurious voyagers in Summer seas. Only did Gorges divide them into watches between himself and Scroop, whom he appointed mate, and he made but one rule—that the watch be comparatively sober when it came its turn.

He kept a sharp eye upon the sun that morning, however. When it stood almost south, high over the larboard beam, he took the key from his pocket and, accompanied by Scroop, came to the cabin door where Taruma sat luxuriating in the sun. He kicked the Prince of Aromaia aside with his heavy sea-boot, opened the door and summoned Butshead forth, leaving the door unfast.

Taruma at once slipped in and studied his patient. Barbary was lying on the locker, no longer smiling and fanciful, but with a pallid face and glassy, staring eyes. At intervals he groaned and his almost nerveless hands tried to clutch at his stomach, as if he suffered great pain. But he was apparently either too weak to stir or was under the influence of some drug. Taruma nodded his head in satisfaction and squatted down at his side, his eyes never leaving Barbary's face.

Outside, Gorges delivered his ultimatum to Dick Butshead.

"Thou'rt a smart lad," said he, without apparent animus; "smarter than thou wouldst ha' me think, but not a quarter as smart as thou thinkest thou art, Master Butshead. Thou seest how she heads. 'Twill be thy task to set her right by the sun. Thou learned somewhat o' Raleigh an' thou hast learned more by experience since thou left Plymouth. An' thou be as anxious to win back to England with the

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gold as the rest of us, ha' done wi' thy yeas and nays an' do thy best to bring us to Trinidad."

"Thou wilt not turn back—at least to the Verdes?"

"No!" said Gorges stolidly.

"And from one noon to another am I to be locked in there with a madman?"

"Not an thou dost thy bit o' sarvice."

Butshead looked at Gorges. Their eyes met and held a few moments. In the mutineer's the mate saw nothing but dogged determination to have his own way. The mate did not press for knowledge of the alternative, preferring to let Gorges think he but yielded his own judgment to the general voice.

"My best is all I may do," said he, turning back into the cabin and procuring Barbary's navigating instrument and a telescope.

Upon the queer angle-measuring mystery Gorges glared, but with a wholesome respect. Butshead noted the look and took advantage of it to order the mutineer and his crony, Scroop, from the poop-deck. They went without a word.

From the waist of the ship the whole company watched the mate—a man in growth, but little more than a lad in years—go through the weird ceremony of shooting the sun. For the moment they realized that, despite other circumstances, this boy was master of the *Fearless* and would remain so absolutely for many days.

Butshead, in the meantime, felt none of the confidence his business-like manipulations suggested. Never once had he made an observation that was correct. His final arrivals at accurate results had been only through repeated re-calculations and figurings in comparison with Raleigh's or Barbary's reckonings.

But he determined that he should pretend neither ignorance nor uncertainty as long as he possibly could. He knew he could come within some more or less measurable distance of the ship's position, enough at least to correspond with the general direction of the sun's risings and settings—the only check Gorges could have upon him. For the rest, it mattered little to him whether in the end his positions proved right or wrong, provided he kept up the appearance of it until Barbary recovered sufficiently to establish the vessel's whereabouts in that mighty desert of water.

HE PRESENTLY retired to the cabin and honestly set himself to work, figuring as he had been taught in a measure by Raleigh and Barbary. Before doing so, however, he unrolled the chart which Barbary had marked on the previous day. At a random point some distance west and south of Barbary's last marking Butshead made another little cross.

Then he went to work to try and establish the ship's actual position.

Less than an hour later there was a tap at the door. Gorges, somewhat modest and ingratiating in his manner, entered, removing his cap as he did so and touching his forelock.

"How does she stand, Cap'n?" he asked.

Butshead looked up with a frown and waved a hand to the chart, over which Gorges bent with deep interest. He put a tarry finger on the second cross and grunted with satisfaction. The second cross quite accorded with his own rough mental calculation in the meantime of where the *Fearless* should be, more or less.

Butshead worked away at the mysteries which Gorges did not stop to think should be over for the day. On the mate's face was an expression of intellectual preoccupation. Gorges traced with his forefinger an imaginary line over an unbroken expanse to the Isle of Trinidad.

"She should bear a couple o' points more to the west," said he, tentatively.

"West-sou'west," said Butshead monotonously.

"West-sou'west it is, Cap'n," said Gorges and, satisfied, he again touched his forelock and made for the cabin door.

There he paused only a moment to look at the limp figure of Barbary on the locker. He grinned and said—

"Happen we can do fine 'ithout 'im, Cap'n Butshead."

Then he went away. When Butshead came out upon deck two hours later, his head a maze of conflicting figures out of which he had struck a more or less happy average, he was rewarded by more approving looks from the waist. The *Fearless*, he observed, was now heading west-southwest. Tarry was at the wheel and seeing to it.

For days thereafter little happened aboard the *Fearless*. The same course was held more or less, slight corrections being made each day after Butshead's struggle with the mysteries. Gorges was

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unaware that sometimes late in the afternoon, when Butshead struck his more or less happy average of mixed results, the young mate erased the mark he had made for the boatswain's benefit and made another a little further north, south or west. The alteration was never marked enough to be noticeable.

The weather continued good. The *Fearless* needed hardly any attention. The watches were slovenly kept and as the days went by Gorges' discipline was overlooked, even by himself. Liquor flowed freely, and each day ended with a carouse in the waist or in the quarters forward.

The poop was the one sacred place where none trespassed, save the helmsman and Gorges when business called. The mutineers had sense enough to respect that. Taruma brought the meals to the cabin from the cook's galley and between times doctored Captain Barbary, who lay half unconscious still, muttering or groaning. What Taruma had done to the master Butshead never learned; but Barbary's hallucinations had departed as suddenly as they came. Now he was only a very sick man who very slowly showed signs of improvement.

It was two weeks before Barbary one day opened his eyes and stared at the Indian, who nodded satisfaction. Immediately Taruma quietly summoned Butshead, and for a little while the captain and his young mate talked together. Butshead told him all that had occurred. The captain closed his eyes, thought a while, then said:

"Aye, lad, thou hast done wisely and well. So let it continue to be as 'tis. Thou wilt strike land northwest or southwest of a certainty. There's many a day to spare afore I need correct the reckonings. For the nonce, lad, let them think I still be helpless and wandering. 'Twill save a conflict, mayhap, atween Gorges and me."

The only little cloud that arose between Gorges and Butshead during the ensuing ten days was in the former's efforts to find out the secret of the intimacy which had strongly developed between Butshead and the Indian, Taruma. Time and again Gorges had noted them in close converse, but never, despite his best efforts, had he been able to determine the nature of their talk. It troubled him little, however, beyond a passing scowl. Be they in league or mere comrades, the present position must be maintained on both sides. In time Gorges would decide what was to be done with both Master Simons' nephew and the young Prince of Aromaia.

The *Fearless* had been thirty days out from the Canaries when, to the relief of the crew, who had vainly watched for the appearance of land for days, Captain Barbary, erect, clear-eyed and very much master of his ship, appeared on the poop-deck with the navigating instrument in his hands. With practiced surety he shot the sun, returned to the cabin, did some figuring and, laughing quietly, made a cross-mark on the chart right in the channel between Barbadoes to the north and Trinidad to the south. Butshead stared in astonishment. He had brought the ship within fifty miles of his mark.

"Good, m'lad!" cried Barbary, slapping him on the back. "But in two hours more ye would ha' missed thy mark below the horizon and lost the *Fearless*, most like, on the reefs to leeward."

When the news was broken to the crew by Barbary himself, there were three hearty cheers given for "Cap'n" Butshead, to whom even Gorges for the time felt warmly disposed. Then the prow of the *Fearless* swung to the south, where presently the land clouds of Trinidad arose like silvered wool.

CHAPTER IX

FINESSE *VERSUS* BLUFF

WHEN a native runner brought word to Don Antonio de Berreo, the Spanish governor of Trinidad, that an English ship had sailed through the Dragon's Gorge, the northern entrance to the bay of Puerto de los Españoles and was bearing down toward the anchorage, his Excellency at once summoned his son, Don Antonio de Ximenes.

Ximenes presently appeared before his obviously perturbed sire. The latter sat impatiently tapping a mahogany table in the stone-walled, stone-paved room which, for coolness in that torrid isle, had been built slightly under the level of the ground. The upper story of the Spanish house was built for health and luxury, reached by a broad flight of stairs ascending from a luxuriant tropic garden. In answer to his

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father's summons, Ximenes had left his mother, Doña Pia, daughter of old Gonzalez de Ximenes, who had been Berreo's predecessor in Spain's persistent hunt for the golden city of Manoa, or El Dorado.

For the family of Antonio de Berreo was strangely interwoven with the history of that bloody, but as yet fruitless, venturing into the interior of Guiana and the upper reaches of the Orinoco. To find that golden city of the Incas was the family fetish, even as to recover the Holy Sepulcher had been that of many old French and English families.

Old Gonzalez de Ximenes had tried and failed and tried again and failed again. Ere his death he had given to his lieutenant, Antonio de Berreo, his daughter, Pia, in exchange for an oath that Berreo would continue the search. Doña Pia furthered that ambition with all the subtle ambition and determination that was evident in her still, ivory-hewn face and dark, meeting brows.

Their son, Don Antonio de Berreo y Ximenes, had absorbed the ambition at the breasts of this same dark-eyed mother. Himself, ere he was twenty, had survived the disasters of several expeditions both by land and river. He had been captive with his father that time Captain Raleigh, in revenge for the ambush by the Spanish governor of eight of his men, had taken Berreo prisoner and, holding him aboard the *Lion's Whelp* for days, coaxed from him all that he knew of the golden city and the many river channels leading to it.

The governor was now advanced in years, but his ambition for El Dorado was as young as ever, despite that his enslavement of whole tribes of Indians and all the power of Spain behind him, had brought him no nearer to its fulfilment. His son, Ximenes, was now his right hand to carry on the inquisition to his ends. El Dorado should be the inheritance of the descendant of the Spanish adventurers on both sides of the questing family. Part of that inheritance, with which neither Berreo nor Ximenes fully reckoned, was the native memory of tribal princes tortured with dropping hot oil and other delicate refinements of Spanish coercion.

As Ximenes appeared in the dim light of the cool chamber of hewn stone, his Excellency looked up. The frown momentarily left his face and a gleam of satisfaction succeeded as for a few seconds he took in the tall, aristocratic, insolent bearing of his son. Don Antonio de Ximenes had all the beauty of his mother, all the insolence of his grandfather, the merciless, domineering old Gonzalez, and the physical power that had been Berreo's own in his younger days.

Ximenes heard the news of the English ship with a faint smile, which his Excellency checked with his next utterance.

"An it be Raleigh, Ximenes—remember we parted upon terms which were excellent —for him. It may be this time Fate shall work to opposite advantage. But we must be wary if he comes with power. Yet but one ship hath appeared. It may be Raleigh's flagship and the rest of his fleet are but delayed."

He looked keenly at Ximenes, who read his thought before it was uttered and smiled.

"An it be Raleigh—alone," said the younger Don Antonio, "it might break the spirit of his company to come up and find their captain and his ship already in our hands."

"Ximenes," said his Excellency, "thou art swift of comprehension. Yet it may be but a single adventurer and but one ship. Yet an it be English, 'tis enough! With Drake harassing our coast towns and Trinidad swept bare of our *soldados*, we ha' need of what we can take for our enforcement. Go thou aboard, then, and judge as shall seem wise to thee. Thy mother hath taught thee fine manners. Display them, my son, to thy credit."

Ximenes laughed. The governor smiled. The younger Don Antonio left the chamber and summoned the guard and his friends, Dons Pardo Baroja and Blasco Bazan who, having heard of the English ship, were impatiently awaiting some word of action.

After Ximenes had gone Don Antonio de Berreo sat for some time at the table in his cool executive chamber, tapping his finger-tips upon the mahogany table and peering before him with narrowed eyes. Later he went into the gardens, ascended the flight of stairs to where upon a shady portico Doña Pia plied her long needles.

"This night, *carissima*," said he, "methinks we shall entertain."

She lifted her brows. Her steady dark eyes studied his in silence; then, with the faintest inclination of the head, she resumed her womanly employ.

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Ximenes, in the meantime, told the news to Baroja and Bazan. Eagerly they held counsel upon their outward attitude and their ulterior plan. Presently they took twelve armed Spaniards and had the native crews summoned to man several boats. The guard was exceptionally large for a peaceful reception, but the impression Ximenes wished to convey to the English intruders upon the Spanish colony was that they were not without relative power.

As a matter of fact, the twelve *soldados* were exactly half of the entire Spanish armed force on the island, the depredations of Drake further to the west having called forth all Berreo's men to the support of the governor of Cumana.

The *Fearless* had dropped anchor by now about a mile from the shore, for the almost landlocked gulf between the two narrows which cut off the forked tips of Trinidad from the mainland was remarkable for its extending shallows.

There was considerable nervousness aboard the English vessel. It was necessary that they obtain, if possible, further supplies of fresh food, and there was immediate need for water. To this end it was essential that they appear friendly to Berreo's people, and that friendship could be maintained only by a bluff of strength.

The bluff appeared when Ximenes, smiling graciously and with Baroja and Bazan bowing at his side, and the strong guard of "honor" lined up behind, welcomed the adventurers in the name of the Spanish King and his governor, Don Antonio de Berreo. All the while Ximenes' eyes were swiftly taking in the ship, its company and particularly the personality of Captain Barbary.

He, alone—and perhaps the youth at his side, who might have been anything from cabin-boy to mate—was free from a curious restless nervousness which sat upon the rest of the English company. Ximenes noted this and began to draw conclusions that were satisfactory to himself.

Barbary politely returned the greetings. The *Fearless* would not linger. Knowing the hospitality of his Excellency the governor and his friendship for Sir Walter Raleigh—whose flagship and the remainder of the fleet were but a few hours' sail behind—the vessel had merely dropped anchor to await the main squadron and to replenish stores.

Ximenes, while casting the island and all its resources at the feet of any ship of Captain Raleigh's interests, mentally decided that Barbary was lying and that his crew, less schooled than himself, could not conceal that they knew it. This was no ship of Raleigh's command. That astute adventurer would not enter an inimical port save at the head of his whole force. Moreover, this company had never known Raleigh's discipline and this ship was disreputably unlike the vessels of Raleigh's first expedition. Barbary lied. This English vessel was a free-lance and the Spanish King had need of it, putting the eternal enmity of the two races aside as a detail.

Ximenes, still courteous and smiling, invited the company ashore, there to receive the entertainment Raleigh's friends "had a right to expect" at the hands of Don Antonio de Berreo. At that Captain Barbary begged leave to exchange a word or two with his associates, the principal of whom he introduced in the persons of Master Butshead and Master Gorges.

While the Spaniards pretended to overlook this conference by examining the ship and conversing with such members of the crew as could speak a little Spanish, Barbary, Gorges and Butshead retired to the cabin. There they found Taruma peering through the small cabin window at the visitors. Barbary curtly ordered him out.

Only Butshead noted the tense light in the Indian's eyes as he obeyed. Taruma, leaving, did not show himself on the deck, but stole like a lithe jaguar to the nearest cover and continued to peer at the Spaniards, finding some special interest in the governor's son, Ximenes.

IN THE cabin they were discussing the advisability of accepting that invitation and trusting in the bluff having worked.

"It may hold long enough to get us all we want here," said Barbary.

"Aye," said Gorges, "but if it does not we ha' nothing to fall back on, and this Don D'ego hath a sorry way with him. He were friendly to Raleigh only that Raleigh had him captive aboard the *Whelp*. And for why, Barbary? For that Raleigh's captain, Whiddon, as lies buried on this same isle, was ambushed with eight men that were invited ashore same as we be."

"Why linger here at all?" suggested

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Butshead. "Up anchor and make for the river. There ye will find fresh water a-plenty and fruits—aye and friends, too, for we ha' the Prince of Aromaia on our side."

"Aye, aye, lad," said Barbary anxiously, "but thou dost forget. We could do without water and provision, but if the friendship of this Spanish don is to be had, we must even have it. Our ship may not ascend past the rapids at the delta mouth and, without some friendly pact, we may return with a *galiota* laden with gold to find our seagoing craft in this governor's hands."

"Y'are right, Barbary. Y'are right," said Gorges shrewdly. "'Tis a risk, but we must even take it, an' we ha' no knowledge he hath the power ashore he would have us believe. Methinks twelve men for armed guard is a desperate bluff if he would invite us into a trap. An' by that same appearing of theirs he can not gainsay our right to go ashore armed alike."

"Chance it! Chance it!" said Barbary with sudden decision. "Keep your ears trimmed to seaward. If ye hear the carronade and make no appearance on the beach, I will know ye are in trouble and do what I may to bring you out safe. An ye ha' a set-to before that, your guns will warn us aboard.

"Take, then, Master Butshead as leader. He hath a shrewd wit and a deceiving youth. I give thee twenty men—all English, and I ha' matched twenty such against a hundred Spaniards afore now. And linger no more than ye ha' need to."

Presently the trio rejoined the Spaniards. The invitation was accepted. Butshead picked his men at a word from Barbary. For himself he chose the Scotsman, Fergus, and for Gorges the man, Tarry. Tillson, also a friend of the mate's, was left aboard and Gorges' crony, Scroop. For the rest, the eighteen other men were a mingling of *Fearless* flotsam. Captain Barbary was to remain aboard.

Barbary watched the flotilla of boats until it beached at Puerto de los Españoles and then until Spaniards and English alike disappeared among the coconuts which served as a windbreak to the governor's house. Then he turned from his troubled reverie to find the Indian, Taruma, standing behind him with an intelligent light in his eye and an apparent desire to speak.

Barbary walked into the cabin and Taruma followed, shutting the door after him.

"Taruma know that man," said the Prince of Aromaia simply. "He bad man—play trick. Barasai and all white men no ever come back!"

"What dost know thou of whom—which man?" asked Barbary sharply.

"Me tell," said Taruma, his eyes glowing dully and with a curious reminiscent distance. "He grand man call Zamanai (Ximenes). He kill my father, Morequito, king before Topiawari, now king Aromaia. He with big lord of Trinidad, Berai, who after take Topiawari same way and make him heavy with chain and burn feet make tell which way go to land where plenty gold live. Same man kill Morequito, he son to Berai. Both burn Topiawari feet. Both very bad."

Barbary grunted and began to walk up and down. Doubts of the wisdom of his course, anxiety for Butshead and his party increased. Taruma broke in upon his worrying with characteristic simplicity. He unfastened the green stone that held the jaguar skin at his left shoulder. The mottled robe fell to the cabin floor, leaving him nude, save for a loin-cloth.

"Me go to land look find out," said he.

Barbary stared at the youth, noting as he did so the lithe muscles moving snake-like under the Indian's bronzed skin.

"How? An thou took the skiff 'twould be noted and make for suspicion."

Taruma only understood that the captain misunderstood.

"No see Taruma," said he. "Me swim very far sometimes."

Relief dawned upon Barbary's face. It was not that Taruma could do much, but he might learn what was afoot and bring positive information. He might at least return to tell what had happened, if it was too late to undo the mischief.

"Go, lad," said he, bringing his hand down upon a velvet-like shoulder that suddenly stiffened under his grasp like bent steel. "Go, and bring me news."

Without a word, and leaving the jaguar skin where it had fallen, Taruma, Prince of Aromaia, walked out of the cabin, descended into the waist, glanced to right and left over the off-side of the ship, let himself down by an overhanging rope ladder and noiselessly dropped into the

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sea. He disappeared before Barbary's watching eyes and did not come up again—at least on that side of the ship. When, five minutes later, Barbary discovered him, it was only a head appearing intermittently above the surface of the sea quite some distance away between the land side of the anchored vessel and the shore. He was swimming most of the time under water.

Then began for Barbary and the dozen men left aboard the *Fearless* a time of anxious and dreary waiting. Hours passed without a sign of any activity ashore or the return of Taruma. The isle seemed to be asleep under the sun which had long passed the meridian. Not a soul appeared about the beach. Save for the low-built houses peering through the coconut palms and the top of the governor's palace showing above, it was as if Trinidad was yet awaiting that fine day when the Genoese discovered it.

Thrice Captain Barbary was about to give the order to Scroop to touch off the carronade and through it obtain some acknowledgment from the shore which would indicate that his men had not absolutely vanished out of existence. But each time he refrained. The report of the carronade might start something that was still delayed.

Time and again Barbary swept the beach and the surface of the sea with his glass, hoping for sight of Taruma or of a black spot upon the mirror of the bay. Even Taruma seemed to have vanished into the mysterious maw of that silent isle.

Scroop had just struck eight bells in the afternoon when Captain Barbary's nerves got the upper hand. Anything was better than this doubt, this inaction. He would fire the carronade; but first he would lower away the only remaining boat of any capacity and, with the firing of the gun, strike for the shore against any emergency.

The boat was presently drifting alongside and eight men in her were all armed as the shore-going party had been. Barbary took the tiller. Scroop, before dropping overboard, was about to apply the match to the gun when, from the shore, the sound traveling clearly over the still bay, there suddenly arose an uproar of yelling, exploding weapons and the clash of steel.

"Fire!" yelled Barbary.

The carronade roared forth, not now as the signal intended, but as a message of encouragement to Butshead's party ashore, who must be hard beset. The smoke was still clouding around the carronade as Scroop leaped into the boat. Next minute the small craft was darting ashore before the muscle-driven blades of eight oars.

They made that mile in remarkably quick time, although it seemed to Barbary, shouting and urging at the stern, that the boat was like a sodden log and the rowers' arms petrified. As the little craft sheered through the water, turning up the sea like earth from a plowshare, the uproar from behind the belt of palms grew louder. Apparently a pitched battle was in progress, but the only evidence of it, beyond the noise, was a drift of smoke that trailed out from the blue undershadows of the greenery.

Then a human figure appeared. It was a native by its nakedness and hue. It ran toward the beach, coming to a halt at the lip of the sea just as the boat shot upon the sand.

It was Taruma. He stood there like a statue, only that his breast heaved breathlessly. In his right hand was a native bow and in his loin-cloth were a couple of arrows.

Barbary leaped from the boat into knee-deep water and rushed upon the Indian.

"What news? What is toward? Out there, m'lads. Lively!"

"Berai—Zamanai—try poison-drunk Barasai men. Taruma, he stop. Berai—he dead!"

Such was the enigmatic report that sent Barbary and his men on the run toward the governor's house behind the belt of palms.

CHAPTER X

AN ENGLISHMAN'S BIRTHRIGHT

NEITHER Taruma, nor Butshead, nor anybody else, was able afterward to give a whole or even a connected account of what happened, or just how or why it happened.

On coming within sight of the governor's palace behind the belt of palms, young Butshead and his landing party saw nothing to disturb their surmise that the Spaniards' armed guard was no more than a bluff. At the foot of the stone steps leading from the gardens they were met by about twelve more *soldados*, but these were the to-be-expected guard of honor where Don Antonio stood on the portico with Doña

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Pia as a rather stately reception party. But nowhere else was there any sign of armed force.

"Aye," whispered the Scotsman, Fergus, in his young leader's ear, "but keep yer een open, sir. The sun's ower-bricht for guid weather!"

The sun, to follow Fergus's simile, was indeed bright—very bright. Doña Pia was all smiles. Standing up there on the portico with her hand lightly upon gray-haired Berreo's left arm and looking down upon the rough adventurers, she seemed as some stately goddess, or at least a very grand dame who condescended to play hostess to mariners new-come from the sea.

There was again an exchange of courtesies. Butshead, as leader of the party, was presented to Don Antonio and Doña Pia by Ximenes. The son and heir of the governor had leaned very favorably toward young Butshead from the moment they had left the *Fearless*. The lad's youth, his position of brief authority, the relief and beauty of the occasion and the scene after so many weeks of confinement and anxiety, naturally reacted upon Butshead's temperament. He liked Ximenes for his fine appearing, his bending courtesy—liked him mainly because he desired to like him.

As a result, when Doña Pia singled him out as leader of this lusty band of English adventurers, and offered a delicate hand which he somehow knew he was invited to kiss, he advanced, swept the stone stairs with his hat like one to the manner born, dropped on one knee, and for the first time in his life his lips touched the skin of a lady of high degree.

Thereafter—and he always remembered it with shame or a smile for his youth—he was soft clay in the capable hands of Doña Pia, who was quite old enough to be his grandmother, but looked young enough to be a much closer relative. She encouraged him with radiant looks of personal interest while he again stated the purposes—ostensible—of the *Fearless* in entering the bay.

Then, as Don Antonio de Berreo returned his personal welcome to the representatives of the English ship and begged that its company should not depart before his own people had had a chance to entertain the visitors, Doña Pia went off with the purpose, as she said, of mixing a bowl with her own hands after an ancient recipe of that Gonzalez who had been cup-bearer to no less a monarch than Ferdinand.

Youth—novelty—romance. These three, sensed in combination, have disarmed many a wiser person than Dickon Butshead. Tarry and most of the *Fearless's* men shared his delight in the isle, its sensuous beauty, its earthy smell after the sea, the seeming simplicity and gentleness of the people. Perhaps they had some underthought of the serpent—which was in Eden and never for some mysterious reason expelled, while poor Adam was—but they seemed willing to forget it—until after they had had a sip of that royal brew, at least.

They presently entered the cool, half-subterranean chamber of stone, headed by Don Antonio de Berreo, his son, Ximenes, Dickon Butshead and the Spanish captains, Pardo Baroja and Blasco Bazan. Tarry and his comrades followed a few paces behind with that curious diffidence of class inferiority which is not to be overcome even in an atmosphere of gravest peril.

Only Fergus, the Scot, who possibly came from a land where manners were of secondary importance, stuck close on the heels of his young leader. The Scot's eyebrows lowered like the misty crags on his native bens while his little, pale-blue eyes wandered like a shepherd's seeking the speck that may be the lost ewe.

While Carib servants brought platters of fruits, and Spaniard and Anglo-Saxon, soldier and sailor, gentleman and commoner mingled about the bare room in growing confidence, Berreo conversed with Butshead. He found something familiar in the youth's face. Dickon, honestly but much against his grain, recalled that he had often served his Excellency in the cabin of the *Lion's Whelp* during those weeks when Don Antonio de Berreo was "guest" of Sir Walter Raleigh.

Berreo frowned and was haughty for a moment; then he laughed and complimented young Butshead upon his advancement.

"'Tis the fortune of a man's affairs," said he with a courteous inclination of his head. "We meet upon different ground, señor. And thy capitan, Raleigh? Thou sayest he is even Sir Walter? 'Tis a fitting title for the brave *caballero* he is. I shall welcome him. But when? How far behind

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are his ships? How came it the *Fearless* outstripped her flagship? She must have swift heels?"

Butshead, catching a dull glower from Fergus, lied like a diplomat. The *Fearless* had risked entering the almost landlocked bay by the north passage, the Dragon's Gorge, which was shorter but more dangerous than the southern entrance, the Serpent's Mouth, by which Raleigh's ships—five, *señor*—five sail in all—were entering. Fortunately, tide and current had favored the *Fearless'* dash through the Dragon's Gorge.

So they talked like a pair of polite fencers, while in another part of the slave-built palace, Doña Pia mixed that royal brew the recipe of which, tradition held, the ancestral cup-bearer of Ferdinand learned from one Lucrezia, wife of that Duke of Bisceglia who afterward died of too much Borgia. And she mixed the royal bowl with as calm a pair of delicate brows and as steady a pair of slender hands as Cesare's sister ever had.

Her only assistants were the native slaves who brought to her such herbs as her taste dictated for flavoring. And here, possibly, occurred the slip between the cup and the lip which was born of the Spaniard's belief that, because the Carib was silent and obedient, he was faithful and had forgotten such little things as dusky princes smeared with hot oil and royal ankles shackled with hot chains.

Possibly the whisper of Doña Pia's gentle employ traveled as a lightning breath among the Carib slaves who swarmed about the palace and came to the ears of a slim, half-naked youth whose name was a sesame to all native secrets.

In any event, something presently happened which should not have happened had boiling oil and hot gyves ever been efficient in inspiring fear, if not affection.

Into the cool, stone-built chamber several Indian slaves brought the famous Gonzalez bowl of good-will and peace among enemies. It was hailed with a general acclamation. Don Antonio de Berreo arose by the mahogany table upon which it was placed and swept his hand over the bowl as a sultan might in exhibiting his family's treasure of treasures.

Ximenes, Baroja and Blasco Bazan permitted themselves an anticipatory smile. Tarry and company vulgarly smacked their lips. The palate of unaccustomed employ has the daintier sense; and this was gentleman's tipple. Butshead even fancied a measure of that golden liquid which twinkled in the great silver bowl like distilled sunshine sprayed with rose-petals.

ONLY Fergus, the Scot, scowled. Possibly he came from a land where floral adornments were considered an insult to distilled peat-reek, or he may have felt a racial suspicion about large quantities of something for nothing. He looked positively anxious as Don Antonio de Berreo filled a cup from the brimming bowl and handed it to Dick Butshead.

Dickon took it with a proper bow and cleared his throat, either for a passage for the luscious liquid or for a few words of courtesy. Fergus glanced with his far shepherd eyes around the stone-walled chamber. There were but two exits, one closed and leading presumably to the rear of the house, or some dungeon, the other open and admitting the sunlight from the gardens. Both were, he noticed, neatly covered by the Spanish guards.

The only other breaks in the walls were several small iron-barred windows set level with the gardens and admitting a further modicum of light and air. They might have been designed for musket-ports in case of siege in this half-subterranean room.

Dick Butshead, with some confused words, raised the cup to his lips. At the same time Don Antonio rapidly filled other cups and Ximenes, Baroja and Blasco Bazan were passing them around, doing greater honor in the personal service.

But only Butshead had swallowed a sip of the liquor when a literal bolt descended into that chamber. Whether it came from the open door or from one of the small barred windows none knew then or afterward—and it mattered little; but suddenly Don Antonio de Berreo dropped the golden dipper from his hand. It fell into the silver bowl with a splash. His excellency seemed to stiffen all over. His mouth opened, his eyes started in his head and his left hand was seen to be gripping a feathered shaft which was sticking out of his rich doublet just over his heart.

Butshead did not see what had happened at once, for the cup was to his lips and his head slightly thrown back. Then other things happened so rapidly that he never could remember in which order they

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transpired. He only knew that the explosion of a pistol checked him in the second gulp of the liquor and the cup was somehow jostled from his hand in the sudden commotion around him.

He looked, stared, then drew his weapon with a roar of rage.

The Spanish governor was lying across the great chair behind the table, an arrow protruding from his breast. His son, Ximenes, was attending him. Opposite him—Butshead—Pardo Baroja was holding a smoking pistol which Fergus had just struck up with his arm. Baroja's eyes, fixed with deadly vengeance upon the young leader, told their own tale of a bullet deflected.

Blasco Bazan had leaped to one side and, his sword drawn, he was shouting some orders in Spanish. Out of the tail of his eye, Butshead saw his men hurling cups right and left and drawing their cutlases, while the Spanish *soldados* presented their loaded muskets inward from the doorways.

It was a trap! It was needless to consider now the obvious manner in which they had wandered into it like foolish sheep. It was needless to wonder at this time why the springing of it should have cost Don de Berreo his life by a native arrow. Something unforeseen had occurred, and all that appealed to men's senses in that moment was the need of fight—furious fight, if they would extricate themselves.

"The door! The door!" yelled Butshead, himself rushing upon Blasco Bazan, who seemed to be leading the *soldados*.

Fergus was engaging Baroja, who had hurled his pistol in his face and missed. Already the men of the *Fearless* were fighting back to back toward the door leading to the gardens, half of them retreating before the Spaniards, who pressed upon them from their undisputed post at the rear exit, the other half trying to hew a way into the open.

Already the stone-walled chamber was pandemonium, a hell of sound and smoke. The flag paving was wet with a mixture of blood and spilled liquor flecked with flower petals, for the mahogany table had been overturned and the liquor bowl with it.

But the striking down of Berreo seemed to have upset the calculations of the Spaniards and gained a moment's respite for the Anglo-Saxon adventurers. By that moment hung their lives.

Before the rear guard from the other door could press in to the enforcement of their fellows, the whole concert of the *Fearless'* men had rushed the open exit, almost instinctively, and the *soldados* there had broken.

It was only for a moment, but time enough for the English fellows to take the breach. There the fight was waged for a few minutes, the positions all but reversed, the Spaniards hemmed within. But it was not in Butshead's mind to wage the war of extermination which had been planned against him. He was still in doubt as to what forces the Spanish had upon the island and outside of the palace.

"Out! Out!" he yelled, darting past Bazan as the latter slipped on the wet flags and before he could recover. "Into the open, lads!"

To the glory of Anglo-Saxonhood be it said that not a man obeyed the order until both he, Gorges and Fergus—who had downed Baroja—cut their way through the mêlée and had also a clear exit.

Butshead, Gorges and the Scot were the last to dash out through the five-foot gap. Over the heads of the Spaniards who were blocking themselves in their efforts, all as one, to get through the doorway in pursuit, the mate saw Ximenes bending over the still figure of Berreo in the chair, Baroja half-lying across the mahogany table with a hand to his head and Bazan rising with a curse from the slippery floor and seizing up his weapon again.

All in a flash he saw that picture, and before he backed quickly out after his men he saw another movement in it. The rear door suddenly flew open and a demon of a woman—the same stately goddess whose hand he had kissed but a few minutes or eternities before—appeared there, took in the situation at a glance, then uttered a shriek that was more of feline rage than womanly grief.

That was all. Butshead found himself next instant out in the sunlit gardens. The air, after the coolness of the chamber, seemed hot as in an oven. The men of the *Fearless* were spread in a line just inside the belt of palms, every man facing the palace and the door through which the *soldados* poured on the heels of Butshead, Gorges and Fergus.

The moment the three were within their line the English adventurers fired their

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swiftly reloaded weapons. Almost at the same moment, from out of the bay beyond the palms came the sharp roar of the carronade. A cheer went up from the Anglo-Saxons. Help was coming. Still cheering, they emptied their pistols at the oncoming *soldados*.

Then the hot fight continued, but after a steadier fashion. The men of the *Fearless* numbered about twenty. The Spaniards, not including Bazan, who led, Baroja, who was but slightly wounded, Ximenes, who would presently appear to vent his grief in vengeance, and such of the natives as had taken arms for fear of their masters, numbered about twenty-four. But help was coming from the *Fearless*.

Even then, though they might outnumber the Spaniards—granting the latter had no other *soldados* to come up—the battle was one of perhaps thirty men in the open against almost an equal number under cover of the stone-built palace and its handy stairway. For almost immediately the Spaniards took to umbrage, delivering their fusillades with care. They surmised, and rightly, that the visitors had come ashore with more of a show of arms than a supply of powder and shot. And they did not propose to come to an open-hand fight with men who had sailed with Drake and Raleigh—that is, if they could decimate them otherwise.

FOR five minutes the desultory firing continued, the shots becoming fewer on the English side. The Spaniards had lost several men, some of whom were lying openly in the sunlight. Butshead himself was unscathed, but the man, Tarry, had gone down and with him two others who might or might not be dead. Butshead's fear was a charge from the Spaniards to which they could reply by a stand with steel, for they could not hope to win a retreating fight without repelling firearms and the powder was all but exhausted.

His men, on the other hand, confident that they could hold their own with ease until Barbary's crowd appeared, desired nothing more than a hand-to-hand fight. Tauntingly they invited the Spaniards to come out and wage it.

Butshead's fear of the result was perhaps due to a certain physical weakness which had been stealing upon him for the last few minutes. His head swam. He suffered strange qualms at his heart and a curious torturing in his veins, as if his flowing blood was a squirming, biting, fiery snake. Flashes of fire burst before his vision and he had a sudden belief that all this was a dream—a hallucination——

Then the woman appeared—and he was sure of it. She came like some frightful vision upon the portico of the governor's palace. Her face was demoniac with fury and smeared with blood which had come from the hands with which she brushed her loosened hair back from her temples. It was Doña Pia and she had just discovered that her husband, Antonio de Berreo, was dead. Her hands had discovered his heart's blood when she withdrew the mysterious arrow.

There she stood, and to Butshead with his swimming brain and tricky visioning she was some demon of delirium. She tore at her breast, tore at her long black hair and screamed—screamed. She cursed and called upon her son, upon Baroja, Bazan, the *soldados*, to avenge father, lord and master; to tear the English dogs limb from limb, to hack them in a thousand pieces.

The Spaniards responded. It was the last thing Butshead remembered for a while—the sudden burst of huzzas, as led by Ximenes and Bazan, the *soldados* burst from cover and charged down upon the line by the palm-belt. Dimly, as the world swam before his lightning-split vision, he imagined a great cheering of Gorges and the men behind him.

He fell senseless as Barbary with eight more men of the *Fearless* burst upon the scene from the beach.

Then the fight was resumed, this time to the disadvantage of the Spaniards. The *Fearless* men were reinforced. Had they chosen to make a stand they might have decimated the Spaniards, but there was still that doubt as to what the dons' real force was. Barbary ordered instant retreat to the boats, and the Englishmen fell back fighting every step of the way.

At the water's edge the hand-to-hand battle was terrific, even in its miniature dimensions. But the launching of the boats was effected and they pushed off, still wrestling with the *soldados* who struck at them from waist-deep in the sea, while their comrades fired from the shore.

Necessity lent strength to their oars

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as they rowed toward the *Fearless*. Already the Spaniards were assembling boats and native *canoas* to harrass and, if possible, capture the vessel. Barbary at once set half his men to weighing the anchor and the other to making sail.

Just as it seemed they must be boarded by hordes of Indians who, seeing the victory go to their masters, sought to appear ardent on the winning side, the *Fearless* gathered way. Before the same wind which had brought them in earlier in the day she stood out toward the Serpent's Mouth at the other end of the bay.

Then Barbary piped all hands who were able to muster. Out of about thirty, seven were wounded and three dead—by the count.

By the count? Barbary made it again. Then he realized that three men were unaccounted for.

"Where's the mate?" he asked hoarsely.

"And Tarry's gone!" cried somebody.

"Tarry's counted done for," said Gorges, "and Fergus don't answer."

"And the Indian—Taruma," said Barbary. Then suddenly he cast a glaring eye at the shore and shouted: "By God! I won't leave them. We'll put back and save the lads or fight to the last man!"

"No, ye don't!" said Gorges sullenly. "Not wi' this ship or this crew. I warned ye—didn't I warn ye—havin' mind o' that Don D'ego an' his trick wi' Whiddon? Now ye see what ye've led those lads into, an' God knows we can't help 'em!"

"Ye refuse to obey my orders?" cried Barbary with a queer thickness in his voice. "I speak to you, men!"

The men looked at their ringleader, Gorges; then shuffled uneasily and half turned away. Gorges glowered sullenly at Barbary.

"Ye see?" was all he said.

"Then," said Captain Barbary in a fine indignation, "take thou command o' this ship, Gorges, an' look no more to me for guidance or navigation. And God help all Englishmen, for that thou hast betrayed their birthright!"

"We ha' no further need o' thee, Barbary," said Gorges insolently; "no, nor thy Scripter neither." He pointed to the land over the starboard bow—the mainland of South America beyond the Serpent's Mouth. "Yon's the mouth of the Orinoco.

"Lads!" he cried, turning to the men with a joyous cackle, "we've won to it, odds ag'in us all the way! We'll drop anchor there afore mornin', an' then—I'll con our boats up the stream to a mountain that's just one solid chunk of gold!"

A cheer burst from the men. Upon the instant, Butshead and whatever unfortunate companions were left with him on the Spanish island were forgotten. Barbary turned with a kind of groan and walked slowly into his cabin.

CHAPTER XI

THE MISSING TRIO

IN THE early dawn of the following day and about the same time the anchor of the *Fearless* was dropped by her reckless crew in the Bay of Guanipa at the mouth of one of the Orinoco branches, Dick Butshead opened his eyes to a scene that was strangely peaceful compared with that upon which he had closed them.

He lay in a *hamaca* of woven grass swung just clear of a beaten earth flooring. Over his head there was a roof of twisted palm leaves. The frayed eaves of this angular thatching came almost to the ground all around, but did not quite reach it. Fowls wandered in and out under this space at will, and once a small, black-haired pig charged the poultry with a snort.

The door of this hut faced Butshead where he lay—a mere break in the slanting thatch. Beyond it the early sun was dispersing strata of mist that lay like giant cobwebs between all sorts of strange-appearing trees. There was no breeze as yet and in the lull between sea-and-land-winds the air was heavy with the odor of earth and over-ripe fruits.

Butshead wondered where he was, how he came to be there, where his comrades were, where the ship. His sensations were pleasant enough and peculiar enough to support a passing idea that he was no longer in the land of the living; for he seemed to have no real physical feelings at all, save one of comfortable non-existence. Except for a slight headache and that heavy lassitude which is a reminder of possible energy, he was entirely satisfied to be dead and to stay dead.

Presently as he lay there trying to connect the threads of memory a dark face appeared in the opening of the thatched

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shelter. Seeing that the sick man was awake, the visitor pushed in with his whole body. He came and crouched by Butshead's side and peered into his face. The light within the thatching was comparatively dim. The new-comer by his dress, his feathered head-piece and the hue of his skin was apparently an Indian—until he spoke.

"Eh, lad, Ah'm richt gled tae see yer een open again. Ah wis fear't ye were by wi't."

"Fergus!" whispered Butshead amazed.

Then he became conscious that his own hand and wrist had in the interval of unconsciousness taken on a curious reddish-brown hue. The Scot chuckled.

"Aye, aye," said he, "yon Taruma's the smart lad for a' he's a blackamoor. But for him the *soldados* would ha' made hash o' us if the wumman didna keep us for the torture."

"How? Tell me. Where's the ship? What happened?"

"Ship's gone," said Fergus. "Maybe they couldna help themselves. Maist like they thocht we were deid, anyway."

Then Fergus recounted all that he knew of recent events. It was Taruma from first to last who had saved the situation and possibly the lives of the whole ship's company, except the few who had fallen in the fight to gain the boats.

Fergus had drawn the story out of the young Prince of Aromaia, piecemeal, and strung it together. On his arrival on shore from the ship, Taruma had made himself known to the natives. It seemed that in the days of his father, Morequito, the Indians of Trinidad had loved and given allegiance to the King of Aromaia as to a great overlord.

Morequito had been killed by the Spaniards at the instigation of Berreo and his son, Ximenes. Afterward the natives of Trinidad had witnessed the spectacle of the succeeding King of Aromaia, Taruma's aged uncle, Topiawari, shackled with hot irons and tortured with burning oil. These same natives had aided Topiawari to escape; and they had had to carry him because the soles of his feet had been toasted.

The natives had not forgotten these things. Their hatred of the Spaniard was undying, if discreetly repressed. To Taruma they paid homage and answered the questions which gave the young prince the knowledge that Doña Pia was brewing a drink for the white men—a drink that had called for quite a quantity of a little white flower which the English later named "the deadly nightshade."

It was Taruma who fired the arrow which laid low the enemy of his father and uncle. He had another arrow for Ximenes, but in the confusion that followed he feared to hit Butshead or Fergus. But, provoking a fight, he prevented all with the exception of Butshead from even wetting their lips with the poison brew. He was not even sure at the time that Butshead had swallowed any of it.

Taruma then made all haste to the beach and urged on Captain Barbary and his men to reinforce the Anglo-Saxons who were likely to be annihilated as soon as their powder and shot were exhausted.

Taruma fought with the men of the *Fearless*, but himself keeping well out of sight. He feared to reveal himself as an Indian on the white men's side, for no matter how the battle went it would mean a Spanish vengeance on the natives of the island, for one of whom he would surely be taken.

It was in the retreat to the boats that Fergus stumbled upon Taruma where he lay in some cassava bushes with a ready-strung bow, hoping for a clear sight of Ximenes.

Taruma beckoned Fergus to his side and pulled him down into the bushes.

"Barasai he fall," he whispered. "Barasai no hurt. He maybe drink poison stuff, but maybe no too much. He friend of Taruma. You no friend of him, too? You and me try get him hide away."

During the few moments these two hid in the cassava bushes in the coconut belt, friend and foe alike swept by toward the beach and the boats. Doña Pia turned and, still raving like a madwoman, disappeared into the house, no doubt returning to vow vengeance over the body of her lord. The coast was quite clear when Taruma darted out into the open space before the governor's house and, seizing Butshead by the shoulders, dragged him back into the bushes. At the same time Fergus ran to the side of the fallen Tarry. It was useless attempting any risk with him. Tarry was quite dead, shot through the middle of the brow.

Fergus rejoined Taruma in the bushes. At the young prince's command he took

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Butshead by the shoulders, Taruma lifting his feet. The Indian led the way and set the pace with the inert mate, travelling not toward the boats but along the coconut belt—keeping within it. This belt stretched without a break for some distance west to where it merged with the tropic jungle which overspread most of the island.

Once in the jungle Taruma called a halt. They laid down the unconscious mate and breathed hard. Then the young Prince of Aromaia put his hands to his mouth and uttered a curious call, not unlike the cry of some forest animal. He did not repeat it, but keenly watched the woods on all sides. Presently from various quarters came, like phantoms, several sinewy, brown figures. They saluted Taruma with a bowing of the head and an outspreading of the hands.

Taruma uttered a few words in the Arawak language, whereupon the Indians with incredible swiftness made a rough litter of branches, lianas and palm boughs. Upon this Butshead, still unconscious, seeming—to Fergus, at least—dead, was placed; and at another command from Taruma the Indians started off with the litter into the very heart of the jungle. Taruma and Fergus followed, half-running as were the litter-bearers.

In a little while they came into an Indian village—a mere scattering of thatched shelters with fowls and pigs and naked children running about. The adult inhabitants cast no friendly looks on the two white men until Taruma in a short speech informed them that these were not Spaniards but enemies of the Spaniards and good friends of Taruma and his people. Whatever else he said it is certain that from that moment Fergus and Butshead were safe from any betrayal by the Arawaks.

They held a council, and, although Fergus did not understand a word that was said, he gathered afterward from Taruma that the elders did not consider it safe for either the natives or the two white men to conceal them in the village itself. They knew, as presently transpired, that the Spaniards would institute a vengeful search of the native villages for such of the English as might have taken to the woods and for possible information as to who fired the fatal arrow.

They had finally taken Butshead and Fergus to an isolated shelter about a mile further into the jungle. None but the litter-bearers accompanied them and these disappeared the moment Butshead was laid in the *hamaca*. Then Taruma had gone alone into the bush, gathered certain herbs, boiled them and forced the liquid between the mate's teeth.

It was dark by this time. Thereafter followed a long night of watchfulness on the part of Taruma and Fergus. About midnight Butshead's breathing became stronger and a faint moisture broke out on his brow.

"Barasai no die now," said Taruma with his gentle smile.

BUT the young prince's labors were not yet ended for the night. Forth he went into the darkness and returned after quite some time with an earthen pot which he must have obtained from the village, as probably the brew it contained. This was a mixture of boiled *anatto* seeds and the juice of the plantain. He washed the sleeping Butshead's face, neck, hands and arms with the mixture, then did the same for Fergus. As the stuff dried it left the skin a deep brownish-red—a sort of copper color.

That done, he covered Fergus's sandy hair with a feathered head-dress which he had also brought. Butshead's hair was brown and most un-Indian, but Taruma, realizing the importance of keeping his patient's head cool, served two purposes by binding the mate's head around with a bandaging of cool green leaves, such as the natives use for fever.

"Barasai he very sick Indian," said Taruma.

Then he looked sharply at Fergus, whose disguise was perfect save that his light blue eyes seemed unnaturally pale against his darkened skin and brows.

"Somebody come, you no look at him," said Taruma gravely. "Too much shallow-water eye. You good medicine-man—watch very sick Indian."

Fergus understood the warning while he hoped "somebody" would quite fail to put in an appearance.

The Scot had just finished telling Butshead his story when Taruma softly entered the thatched shelter. For a moment neither Fergus nor the mate could believe it was the young Prince of Aromaia. No such object could be a prince, surely!

He was dressed simply in a loin-cloth, as

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when he had slipped over the side of the *Fearless*. But by some deft touches he had reduced his usual cleanly appearance to that of an Indian of the lowest class. His black hair, usually so smooth and kempt, was matted and straggling about his ears and eyes. His loin-cloth of woven grass, as well as his arms, torso and legs, were caked with dried dirt, as if he had rolled in mud, then cooked himself by a fire, or as if cleanliness was far from being a general habit.

He vouchsafed no explanation. There was no time. He uttered just two words and walked out again.

"Somebody come!"

Quick as a flash Fergus crouched down by Butshead and fixed his blue eyes upon the patient.

"Shut yer een," he whispered fiercely. "Haud ye breath as long as ye can, then groan, like."

Fergus began to play his part. He sat rocking to and fro in a mysterious manner and incoherently muttered something that sounded like an incantation. Butshead groaned.

Outside there sounded voices—Spanish voices. Then came Taruma's voice in a kind of humble whine. Butshead had learned enough Spanish and Arawak mixed to gather that the Spaniards were *soldados* searching for possible English refugees and for information which might lead to the identity of the mysterious bowman who had slain the governor. Taruma was pretending not to understand what they meant but was pouring out his sorrow that his "brother" was dying of a malignant fever.

There were apparently three Spanish *soldados*. At hearing of the fever one was for passing on in a hurry. The second was inclined that way, too, but unfortunately voiced the thought that it might be a trick, whereupon the third Spaniard pushed past Taruma and walked into the thatched shelter.

At first the soldier saw little on account of the dimness after the glare of the morning sunshine. Then vaguely to his eyes there appeared the picture of an Indian with his head bandaged hugely with fever leaves and by his side an apparent medicine-man rocking and muttering in the mysteries of his craft.

The Spaniard was all but convinced, and something then happened that settled it. Butshead suddenly stirred. His mouth opened wide. His occasional groans changed all at once to a curious gulping and choking and straining, as if he were about to become violently sick. Even Fergus was amazed and terror-stricken. Forgetting all about his part, he grabbed Butshead in his arms and forced him back in the *hamaca*, at the same time saying out loud:

"Guid forgive us, lad! What's gaun gyte wi' ye?"

Fortunately, the Spaniard knew no English, let alone lowland Scots. He stared and then, as the hiccoughing and gulping continued from the *hamaca*, he turned and fairly bolted out of the thatched shelter.

"*Vomito prieto!*" he gasped to his comrades, and at the words the three *soldados* beat a swift retreat toward Puerto de los Españoles, as if pursued by the dread disease itself.

Taruma forgot his gladness at their departure in alarm over the sudden change in Butshead's condition. He rushed into the shelter to find Fergus with Butshead gathered up in his arms, trying to restrain him in his spasms. Taruma knelt down and peered anxiously into the face of his friend, Barasai, who presently became quiet and opened one eye.

"Ha' they gone?" he whispered, scarcely above a breath.

"*Soldados* gone—run away," said Taruma. "They afraid inside for yellow death."

A grin overspread Butshead's face and he sank back in the *hamaca* perfectly satisfied. Then Taruma and Fergus saw through the pretense which had deceived even them.

"Guid forgive ye!" said Fergus solemnly. "Ye put the fear o' death on me."

"And on them," chuckled Butshead.

"Ye should ha' warned me," Fergus said reproachfully. "Man, I out an' spoke English."

"Thou didst not," said Butshead firmly.

Taruma rose with a smile and went outside to where an earthen pot was cooking over a fire. From this pot he poured a steaming yellowish liquid into a smaller vessel, cup-shaped, and brought it to the patient.

"All very good," said he. "Now we cheat altogether. Ship go to Guanipa, Indian friend tell Taruma. We follow when dark come. Indian friend get ready canoe. Now Barasai go sleep. Drink."

Butshead, who had developed perfect confidence in Taruma as a medicine-man, drank the warm mixture put to his lips.

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It tasted like lemon, sugar and water. It was in fact a decoction of fever grass, sometimes called lemon grass.

Fifteen minutes later he was sound asleep, and Fergus himself dozed off. Taruma, fearing no return of the Spaniards, went off to the Indian village and the beach—as filthy appearing a native as ever trod the soil of Trinidad—to confer with his friends on the arrangements for the white men's escape.

No sooner had the sun set and the dusk fallen that evening than Taruma, Fergus and Butshead left the thatched shelter to the poultry and the black-haired pig. Butshead was well, save for a slight weakness brought about by the sweating properties of the fever grass.

They passed through the Indian village where the natives stood in the doorways of the crude dwellings. They silently made obeisance to the disreputable person who was Taruma, son of Morequito, nephew of King Topiawari of Aromaia.

None followed. Taruma led the way straight south through seeming impenetrable jungle and in dense darkness. But in about five minutes they heard the soft wash of the sea and came out in the comparative twilight of the open beach.

Taruma halted them a moment while he uttered the call of a nightbird, to which there came an immediate and similar response from the water's edge.

"Come," said Taruma.

Down the beach he led the two white men to a black group standing waist-deep in the light surf. There were four Indians there and between them they held a fairly large canoe upon the dancing waters.

Into the stern of this they assisted Butshead. Fergus got in beside him. Taruma took up a lookout position in the bow, after which the four paddlers deftly slipped into their places.

A few minutes later the canoe was shooting like an arrow out into the lagoon and southward toward the Serpent's Mouth.

CHAPTER XII

CARIBANA

LITTLE was done aboard the *Fearless* during the best part of the day after anchor was dropped in Guanipa Bay. There were two very strong reasons for this idleness. In the first place, there was some sickness aboard, seven men having suffered more or less serious wounds in the conflict at the Spanish port. The other reason, perhaps the main one, was that Gorges, left to his own resources by Captain Barbary, did not know what to do.

The *Fearless* had no sooner dropped anchor, and the men looked to their leader for further instruction, than Gorges realized that he had made a serious mistake. He had not only lost or abandoned young Butshead, but alienated Captain Barbary. He had taken charge of the expedition himself, as he had intended he should sooner or later, but he had done so too soon to suit his own ends. Excepting Barbary, who was sleeping like a privileged passenger in his cabin, there was not a man on the ship with whom he could confer, or of whom he might seek advice.

Tarry had been left behind; but Tarry was dead, anyway. He had seen him drop with a red star on his brow. His other crony, Scroop, was aboard and unscratched; but Scroop was a wooden-headed dolt, ripe for any mischief if he had a leader to point it out and show him the way to do it. It so happened that Gorges himself at that moment would have liked a leader to show *him* what to do and how to do it.

It was not Barbary's resignation from participation that worried him so much as the loss of young Butshead. Gorges had gained his first objective—the mouth of the river. He had no longer great need of a navigator, but a man who had been there before to help him choose which of the many outlets of the delta was the river which Raleigh and his men had followed to gain the great main stream some two hundred leagues to the southwest.

Indeed it was the river with its maze of tributaries, its labyrinthine swamps and jungle islands that struck fear to the soul of Gorges. His nerve temporarily failed him when he found the ship lying quietly at anchor before that mysterious whirring wall of greenery broken by turbulent tributaries, all as like as peas in the same pod, flowing out of occasional breaks.

Which had Raleigh taken?

Back there in London it had seemed so easy. They all led to the main stream where it was twelve miles broad and where lay the town of Morequito and a sure

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welcome for Englishmen from Raleigh's great friend, the King of Aromaia, old Topiawari.

But was that welcome so assured now that Taruma was lost, too? Gorges cursed himself for a fool. Why hadn't he agreed to sail back or beat about the bay of the Puerto? The Indian, at least, if not dead, could have slipped aboard with the aid of his native friends.

And now the loss of Taruma appeared greater than that of Butshead. True, Butshead in his person was a human document, the words and directions of Juan Martinez for reaching El Dorado engraved on his memory. But Gorges felt he could have achieved his end even without Master Simons' nephew, for he himself had seen the mountain of gold glittering in the sunlight within easy march of the boats in the river. He had been there and brought back from it the gold that Raleigh seized from him. He could go again.

But Taruma? The mouth of the river looked different somehow, as always is the case when one returns to a spot upon which the mind has dwelt with more or less feverish imaginings. The young Indian could have dispelled his doubts with a word, could have piloted the boat's crew up one of these tributaries to the town of Morequito and, through his relationship to the king, Topiawari, insured their welcome and further guidance.

Then there was something else he had temporarily forgotten in his bull-headedness. When Raleigh established his friendship with the old King of Aromaia the latter had given him this Taruma to take to England, and Raleigh had left for hostage against the prince's safe return, two of his men, Francis Sparrow and Hugh Godwin.

How could he account to King Topiawari for the non-return of the Prince of Aromaia? More than that, how could he allay the suspicions of Sparrow and Godwin, if they were still alive, as to the return of a ship, supposedly sent by Raleigh, but commanded by a person like himself, Bulkhead Gorges?

It would never do. Sparrow and Godwin were men chosen for their intelligence and skill in certain directions. Sparrow was an expert penman, Godwin had skill in the making of maps. Between the two of them they must have learned, written and charted a great deal of valuable information as to the country, and particularly of the exact location and manner of reaching Manoa, or El Dorado.

To make friends with Topiawari's people and these two white agents left by Raleigh was the great thing to be achieved. But how was it to be done with Taruma missing, Butshead gone and Barbary in his present mood?

Aye, he had been a fool. He had played his cards wrongly, or too soon. The loss of Taruma and Butshead—he took no account of Tarry and Fergus—might not have been his fault; indeed he had warned Barbary against landing at Puerto de los Españoles; but to have quarreled with Barbary when he did—there was the blunder. What he needed now was one friend to confer with, one intelligent head to check off his own reckonings and plans.

Perhaps it was not too late to square things with Barbary; but in the meantime he would rather the necessity did not arise. If he could but find the particular river-mouth by which to enter. In the meantime while he pondered and racked his memory for some landmark which would distinguish one estuary from another, he gave out that the ship would remain at anchor to give the men an opportunity to rest up and the wounded a chance to recover. Before noon two of the men died, one from wounds, the other mysteriously, as if perhaps he had taken a few sips of Doña Pia's royal mixture. The other five sick men showed signs of rapid recovery.

To offset the depression caused by the two deaths, Gorges had his crony, Scroop, whisper the word that there would be, as a result of the decrease of the crew by at least five, a greater division of gold for the survivors. And to keep their minds still further diverted, the mutineer ordered out two of the largest boats and himself accompanied them on an exploration of the various river-mouths that were visible from the ship. That estuary which he somehow fancied was the one by which Raleigh had finally entered he reserved to the last, telling the men that his other meanderings were in the hope of finding a shorter passage to the Orinoco proper.

But all efforts to find a channel up any of these rivers met with the same ill-success that marked Raleigh's own endeavors eighteen months before. Either the current

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ran too strong, or the boats grounded in the shallows of the rapids. These boats, laden with men and provisions, drew nearly five feet.

It was a despairing Gorges behind an exterior of forced cheer who finally gave the order to explore the river furthest to the west. Here, to his secret delight—of course he had known of this passage all the time—Gorges found that progress could be made by hugging the bank and avoiding the full force of the current.

AN HOUR later the two boats rounded a point of jungle-walled land and found themselves in a smooth, black, penetrating lagoon. This proved to be a small channel running into the sea, making an island of the land which hid it from the anchored vessel.

The moment the boats turned the point, Gorges, in the stern, called almost in a whisper for the men to cease rowing. He himself was staring ahead and to the right at the opposite bank. The men followed the direction of his eager eyes and were about to set up a cheer, but Gorges silenced them with a low curse.

On the opposite bank of the lagoon, or channel, were a number of *canoas* drawn up on a muddy beach. Beyond that was a belt of trees, through which appeared the roofs of a number of thatched houses, some of them built high above the ground on stilts.

"Back water!" Gorges whispered. "Back water—and quiet, if ye value your skins."

The boats slid back around the point and were again screened from the Indian village. All eyes turned expectantly upon Gorges, who appeared to be thinking hard. At the same time there was a light of relief and satisfaction on his face.

"Back to the ship, lads!" said he in little more than a whisper. "I ha' got it straight now, an' I'm free to admit I was beginnin' to ha' my doubts. That's Macuregai, sometimes called Caribana, after their king who's a hell-fire devil if rubbed the wrong way. Back to the ship and we'll talk. It's too late to do aught but mischief before morning. Besides, I'd ha' word wi' Barbary." He winked broadly at his men and added, "Not that any of us 'll bow an' scrape to him, but two heads is better than one, and what's wrong wi' usin' him to our ends?"

The men grunted agreement. With an extreme caution to silence the two boats ran rapidly down the current in midstream and came alongside the *Fearless*.

Once aboard the vessel Gorges whispered to Scroop, who passed the word on to the men. They silently went to their quarters and for the rest of that night there was scarcely a sound aboard the ship to indicate that there was a human being alive in her. She lay a black hulk in a darkness that was little less dense.

Over the jungle tops of the island, from the Indian village beyond, came a throbbing of drums and sounds of singing which grew louder as the hours waxed to midnight. It was unlike the usual plaintive whining of the Orenoqueponi, having in it a note of revelry with a touch of drunkenness. Apparently the white men had stumbled upon the Macuregai during, or on the eve of, one of their bacchanalian feasts.

As soon as the men were under hatches, Gorges walked aft and tapped on the door of Barbary's cabin. It was opened by the stalwart master himself. He seemed blankly surprized at the identity of his visitor and said severely:

"Well? What dost thou want, rascal?"

"Cap'n," said Gorges, bobbing his head and saluting, "I come to ax pardon an' make my peace."

"Thou dost?" said Barbary with a note of irony. He peered over the boatswain's shoulder into the darkness of the deck beyond. "Art thou alone?"

"Aye, aye, sir. We're man to man, an' I allow ye to be the better o' the two."

"Come in," said Barbary, not without suspicion. "I'll hear what thou hast to say, at least."

The moment Gorges was inside the cabin Barbary closed and bolted the door."

"Well?" he repeated.

Gorges bowed and scraped and made his little speech.

"That thing about Englishmen, Barbary. It's stuck in my gullet, an' none o' the crew can swallow it either. 'Tis my fault. They followed my lead. But I ha' this excuse. I had been ag'in that landing at the Spanish town."

"Aye," said Barbary, "and by what we lost an' the little or nothing we might ha' gained by it, maybe I was wrong, too. But, right or wrong, I was master of this ship and no man may throw my orders in my teeth so long as I remain so."

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"Aye, Captain, an' that's where my shoe pinches. I was wrong. The best o' us make mistakes as well as the worst o' us. There! I ha' said it. I'm sorry. Captain Barbary, the ship needs you; the men need you; I need you."

Barbary smiled. He anticipated that Gorges would want something for his penitence.

"Well?" was all he said.

Then Gorges told him of his discovery of Raleigh's channel, which he had identified by the presence of the village. He told Barbary that the Macuregai, under King Caribana, hated the Spaniards worse than snakes, that, in fact, it was Caribana and his people who had completely annihilated Hernando de Serpa's El Dorado expedition and was the great stumbling-block in the path of the various Berreo expeditions.

But in Raleigh's voyage the Englishman had made friends with Caribana, and if they could now take advantage of that friendship, telling Caribana of yesterday's battle with the Spaniards at Trinidad, he had no doubt their retreat would be defended against Ximenes, who would surely make an effort to overtake the *Fearless* and avenge his father.

He then told him of the channel behind the island in which Raleigh's *Lion's Whelp* had found good anchorage and remained hidden for many weeks. Barbary, despite his suspicions of the boatswain, listened with growing interest. He did not himself relish the idea of rotting on this ship for weeks while Gorges and his crew made their try for El Dorado.

"Ye ha' the better headpiece—looks and brains—of the two of us," Georges went on, quite humbly. "I be but a common sailor, after all. Ye ha' the look of the *acarewana*, as they call their chiefs. I axes this favor, Barbary, that ye work the ship into the channel and make a pact with this brown devil, Caribana. That's all I axes. Ye and such men as ye pick and need can remain on the ship while my lot goes with me up the river. Could ye ax fairer, Captain? We must have the ship, and what I says is—who's master of the *Fearless?* Barbary, is what I says."

Barbary sat down and rested his chin on his hand. After all he was a sea-captain. His ship was his charge. He had no desire to follow the fortunes of this parcel of undisciplined ruffians. He had grave doubts if they would ever return from the upper river. Their ungoverned lust would make enemies at every turn. If they returned and brought back gold he would have done his part and could claim his share.

Gorges, keenly watching, saw the captain swither and put in the finishing touch.

"Besides, I ha' a hope, Captain, that maybe young Butshead was not killed and that, the young Indian helping, he may yet escape from Trinidad. I would say, even yet, turn back and lay off and on on the chance, but I ha' got a better thought. Make peace with Caribana, tell him that Taruma was lost, or left in Trinidad. The Macuregai, if I remember aright, owes some sort o' allegiance to the King of Aromaia, which is this Indian lad's uncle.

"Speak the word and I wager my head to a ship's biscuit Caribana sends some of his warriors on the quiet in a canoe to find him and Butshead, so be they are alive. We can wait a day or two in the hope they turn up.

"We must, Captain. We got to deliver Taruma to the big king that sits at the entrance to El Dorado, and this lad Butshead, mark ye, carries in his head the turns and twists o' the way to Manoa as was spoke by Juan Martinez. Besides, Taruma can pilot us straight to Morequito and make sure o' our hearty welcome there. Do I make the idea clear, Captain?"

"Clear enough that thou wantest all this for but one purpose," said Barbary with a slight sneer; "so thou canst win to thine end the easier. Still," he said after a pause, "I may have a purpose, too. It is that these two lads and Fergus may have a chance for their lives. I've been both good and bad in my time, but Barbary never turned his back on a mate yet.

"I agree. At break o' day we work the *Fearless* into the channel behind this island. Find out if it can be made from the sea end of the channel, so as to avoid the river current, then get out your hawsers and we'll tow her to anchorage where no Spaniard is like to stumble on her."

Gorges bowed, touched his forelock most humbly and went out after Barbary had unbolted the door.

THE ribald singing in the Indian village ceased about two o'clock in the morning. The dawn began to break about five o'clock. At the first glimmer of light Gorges and a couple of

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men had gone off in the ship's skiff, and found the sea entrance of the smooth channel on the village side of the island. They made soundings and were back in half an hour with the report that the *Fearless* could enter that way without grounding. They also reported no sign of life in the village.

Right away the anchor was lifted and the men in the boats which were made fast to the *Fearless* by stout hawsers swung her around and headed her for the channel-mouth. Not a sound was to be heard save for the creaking of the oars which was drowned by the wash of the outer seas.

Opposite the channel the vessel's nose was swung again, and then slowly she crawled up the center of the channel, still without arousing a soul in the village. Their potations of the night before had been heavy.

But the luck was too good to last. There suddenly arose from the village a long-drawn yell, followed almost immediately by a chorus of alarm and fury. Dark faces appeared in the underbrush and almost immediately vanished; and still the yelling went on.

"Bend to it, lads!" shouted Barbary from the poop. "Another length and 'tis safe. Then shoot to the larboard side and come aboard lively as we drop anchor."

This was carried out to a hair of time. Just as the *Fearless* made the point of anchorage Barbary had aimed for, there burst from the trees fronting the village a score or more of warriors. And what astonished the white men was that they had not the appearance of warriors caught napping.

They were dressed as for a gala occasion and armed with spears, bows and arrows, and one—the redoubtable Caribana himself—carried a heavy Spanish blunderbuss which he fired pointblank at the men in the boats. Neither this nor the shower of arrows that followed did any harm, but Barbary saw that peril of heavy bloodshed had come.

"All aboard!" he shouted, and at the same time he gave the order for the anchor to be dropped.

The boats backed under the lee of the ship and the rowers scrambled aboard just as another volley of arrows came from the shore. Barbary from the poop, yelled to the giant savage, Caribana, where he stood on the shore giving orders to his warriors, whose number was now increased to about fifty, all armed. Caribana shook his spear and shouted something back at Barbary; but neither understood the other's language.

The Macuregais' purpose was now clear. They regarded the *Fearless* and her company as Spanish and were piling into their *canoas* to board her and fight their ancient enemy to a finish either way. Barbary thanked his God silently that he had had the forethought to arm his crew with hangers and pistols. It would be a fair fight, anyway.

"Stand by, lads, and let no live Indian touch the deck!" he roared, while his heart sickened for the failure of the scheme for peace.

Then that which is sometimes called miracle, but is really blind chance, happened. The *canoas*, led by Caribana himself, were more than half way to the ship's side when, from the channel by which the ship had entered, there shot a *canoa* containing seven Indians. The one in the bow stood up and lifted an arm with a gesture of absolute command. At the same time this Indian uttered a dozen words in the curious musical pitch of the Carib language.

The result was astonishing. The fleet of *canoas* came to a standstill, and then a yell—a yell no longer of savagery, but of joyous acclaim—went up.

"By the Lord Harry!" yelled Gorges from the waist to Barbary on the poop. "It's that young blackamoor, Taruma!"

Without more ado Taruma ordered the *canoa* alongside the *Fearless* and scrambled aboard. After him came two other Indians, whose curious light-hued eyes at once attracted Barbary. Suddenly the captain gave a shout and brought down his hands upon the shoulders of the slimmer of the two Indians.

"Dickon, m'lad!" he cried; then, glancing at the other Indian: "Can it be? Aye, b' the Lord, it's Fergus!"

"Aye. It's masel'," said the blue-eyed Indian with a grin. "Yon Taruma's the grand bit lad."

"That he is!" said Barbary with a deep breath of relief.

They all turned. There stood the crew of the *Fearless*, gaping. There stood Gorges grinning with delight. Over the side of the vessel, Taruma, Prince of Aromaia, was

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assisting Caribana, King of the Macuregai, who at once bowed his head and spread out his hands, palms up, in salutation to the nephew and heir of Topiawari, overlord of all the Orenoqueponi.

CHAPTER XIII

THE AMAZONS

THE moment it was made clear to Caribana and his people by Taruma that the company of the *Fearless* were enemies of the Spaniard, and also that they were countrymen of the great Capuaralli and subjects of Ezrabeta, it became evident that the adventurers need look for no delay at the village of Macuregai.

Still, there followed an anxious half-hour for Barbary, Gorges and Butshead and all the men of the English ship, while every nook and cranny of the vessel was explored by the Indian warriors, who seemed in high spirits.

Taruma shared this most un-Indian cheeriness; laughing, pointing up the river and even going so far as to poke King Caribana in the ribs. The old king giggled like a schoolboy. It was all very puzzling and not a little disconcerting to the whites.

Finally, while Barbary, Gorges and Butshead held conference in the cabin, Taruma announced his intention of going ashore for a council with Caribana. He laughed at the knitted brows of the white men and said:

"No feel trouble inside place. Me Prince of Aromaia. So long you good friend to me, Macuregai good friend to you. Soon get ready start in boat up river, for Macuregai want go quick. Me go too. All go. Show Ezrabeta people long way up."

Then he went ashore and with him departed all the Macuregai, after which the heads came closer together in the *Fearless'* cabin. It sounded too good to be true. But "Trust Taruma," had become a maxim with Butshead.

It was apparent that they had stumbled upon some religious festival or heathen custom of the Macuregai. That might account for the savages' rage at the appearance of the ship; it might also account for their extraordinarily gorgeous attire and elaborate arms and their eagerness to be off on some affair of their own.

"I take it," said Barbary, "that they were just about to start on some expedition—maybe a hunt. Their way may lie our way. If so, we are in better luck than we deserve."

"Trust Taruma," said Butshead, who in the meantime had washed off his Indian disguise.

"Aye, aye," said Gorges. "Raleigh lost days and days grounding on shallows, striking adverse currents and losing channels altogether. They'd most like go the shortest and easiest way to the big river, if that's where they're bound."

"Even if it's but part of the way up the main river," said Butshead, "Taruma is bound for Morequito, where we strike off into the Caroni; and it is from there that Juan Martinez sets the course for El Dorado."

This led to a discussion—a re-reading, as it were, of the human document which was Dickon Butshead. But the human document had little more to reveal, save that the course after Morequito was up the Caroni to where the cataracts barred further progress by boat. Beyond that, El Dorado was but a score of leagues through the jungle. On the way between the falls and the mysterious city lay the mountain of gold, and upon what the latter produced depended whether the company would risk entering the town of the Incas' descendants.

Gorges was satisfied and asked no further questions. But he made the suggestion in his eagerness that, supposing the Macuregai wished to start at once, it would be well to provision the boats and divide the crew, some to remain aboard the ship, the remainder to man the boats up the river.

The company of the *Fearless* now numbered twenty-seven. It was agreed that two-thirds of this number should compose the expedition, Captain Barbary and the other nine men remaining as ship-watch. It was also agreed without discussion that Dickon Butshead, the human document, should accompany Gorges up-stream.

As the success of the whole expedition depended upon the strength of the boats' crews, Barbary made no protest when it was proposed that among his men should be numbered the five who were convalescent. Barbary kept back the Sunderland man, Tillson, whom he knew to be honest and loyal. Butshead expressed only the wish that, having adventured so much already with the Scot, Fergus, the latter be counted in with the Manoa company.

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During all this conference Gorges was as docile and agreeable as might well be. After all, as he said, he was but a common seaman. After all, Barbary was master and Dickon Butshead his mate, and right glad he was to see the lad alive and hearty. In fact, he was humble and deferential, like one who has recently strayed from grace and would make amend.

Everything agreed upon, the trio went out to the break of the poop and Gorges whistled up the crew. Barbary made a little speech, after which the division of the crew took place. Barbary took Tillson to begin with; Butshead picked out Fergus, and Gorges, seeing favoritism and partiality in the wind, promptly chose his crony Scroop as his first man.

The rest went easily enough, save that there was considerable grumbling among those who were held for ship watch while their mates followed the great adventure. The wounded men cursed their luck outright, several declaring their wounds mere scratches. But Gorges silenced them, adding a slight wink which escaped the after company, all except the blue-eyed Fergus.

"Orders is orders," said Gorges, "and Barbary's master here."

After that there was implicit obedience, albeit some lowering brows. Full three-quarters of the crew were Gorges' men and few of these had sense enough to realize that there were great possibilities of the river expedition never returning at all.

The two largest boats still lay on the larboard side of the ship and, so that no time should be lost, the stocking of these was presently under way. The carronade was mounted in the bow of one of the boats. Powder and shot, provisions and other necessities for thirty days were stowed away. Of water they carried little, depending on the river and springs for their supply.

The provisioning of the boats was barely completed when Taruma came aboard. He was no longer muddy and dishevelled, but attired as befitting a prince of his people. His head was bound in a circlet of gold, stuck around with feathers. He wore a loose, sleeveless robe of some silk-cottony material, with an animal's skin fastened to his left shoulder by a curious green stone. Over his right shoulder was slung a quiver of arrows, together with a bow; and he carried a tall spear.

He was accompanied by three warriors of Caribana's people. These stood on guard outside the cabin door while Taruma conferred with Barbary, Butshead and Gorges within. He explained matters briefly.

It appeared that when the *Fearless* came into the channel the Macuregai were celebrating the advent of what they called the Love Moon. They were about to pay their annual visit to the "Amazons," as the early explorers erroneously called a tribe of women who had since time immemorial lived apart and followed their own peculiar customs.

Only Butshead of those who heard this explanation understood it. Of this tribe of women he had read in several of the queer books in his uncle's Rat Lane collection. Raleigh had sought for this odd people and nearly every explorer before him, even Columbus; but none had ever found the island where the women warriors were supposed to live. The very existence of such a tribe had been, up to now, more or less legendary.

BRIEFLY, these women, as Taruma presently explained, away back in the early years of living people, had been placed on a certain island in the delta. Their men-folk did this because they anticipated a raid from a tribe that was vastly superior in strength. If they were not defeated they would know where to find their women, safe; if they were, they would at least have cheated the enemy of the usual booty of women.

Unfortunately, the thoughtful tribe was completely annihilated. Yet the victors never found the women until years later, when they discovered them in their refuge, a powerful tribe of fighting Amazons who had completely subjugated all the males born since leaving their original home. Necessity had been the mother of their organization.

There had been many wars with these women, Taruma explained, but none had ever conquered them. Finally their queen, Aterima, a wise woman, foreseeing that her tribe would die out, made a pact with the Macuregai. The agreement was that at the new moon of the first Spring month each year the braves of Caribana's people should be made welcome, that on these visits each Amazon should choose her mate and that the two should live together in

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harmony and love until the waning of what was called the Love Moon. Then they separated for another year.

At this news, Barbary looked troubled. If, as he supposed, the men of the *Fearless* and the Macuregai were to visit this strange tribe together, he foresaw trouble at the outset. Butshead, too, was a little doubtful, but he was willing to trust to fortune and good sense in view of the fact that he might bring back to Raleigh and all England the first authentic news of this nation of women, whose existence had gradually come to be doubted. Gorges, on his part, grinned from ear to ear and seemed eager to go forward and break the tidings of prospective adventure to his undisciplined fellows.

The isle of women, Taruma further said, lay hidden in one of the many channels of the delta, but not far from the river which the white men proposed to ascend. Furthermore, if they accompanied the Macuregai they would make better time, as the native course went through labyrinthine channels where there was little or no current.

It was not proposed that the white men should make a landing there, but as soon as the spot was reached he, Taruma, could easily guide them back to the river upon which they now rode, so they might pursue their journey on to Morequito, which Taruma was anxious to reach, having heard that his uncle, the king, Topiawari, was ill and hardly expected to live. Topiawari was about one hundred years old.

In short, the Macuregai, for that the strangers were Ezrabeta's men, enemies of the Spaniard and friends of Taruma, were eager to start as soon as the white men were ready. They had already delayed some hours and were impatient.

When this information was conveyed to the men of the *Fearless* by Gorges they needed no urging to complete their preparations for the journey. The discontent of those who were to be left aboard the ship was considerably increased, but Gorges ruled with an iron hand, assuring the malcontents that none of the white men were to be allowed to land at this delectable place.

Aft, in the cabin, Barbary looked at Butshead and shook his head. Fergus, too, encountering the young mate, drew him aside and said in his solemn Northern way—

"Lad, I'm no' blest wi' second sight, but I foresee trouble."

An hour later the Macuregai put off in their *canoas*—a score of *canoas* containing about one hundred warriors. The two boats of the *Fearless* were ready. After a short handshake with Barbary, Butshead climbed into one boat—Gorges commanding the other—and presently the start was made, Caribana's men marking time with their paddles to a curious chant.

The last Butshead saw of the *Fearless* was where she lay as still as a painted ship in the smooth, black channel before the village of Caribana. On her poop-deck stood Barbary, somber and thoughtful, his arms folded across his chest, and a line of malcontents were leaning over the side. Only one man waved a farewell hand. It was Tillson, the man from Sunderland.

The course of the flotilla of *canoas* and boats lay up the river for some distance. Then the leading *canoa*, in which were Caribana and Taruma, diverged into a jungle-walled channel behind an island. Thereafter, for nearly two days, they encountered little or no current. Had the white men been suddenly abandoned they must assuredly have found themselves lost in that fever-breathing, snake-infested delta of the Orinoco. But so long as Taruma was there and alive, Butshead felt that no disaster would befall.

All that day they sped through smooth, winding channels in what was a land of weird enchantment. At night they made camp on one of the myriad silt islands. After the evening meal the Indians brewed some infernal palm liquor upon which they got sleepily drunk; and Gorges and his men did not lack sociability in sharing the bowl. They resumed their journey at daybreak.

Late in the afternoon of the second day the warriors set up a curious chant. They were nearing their destination, which was about sixty leagues from Macuregai. It was close to nightfall when the flotilla came within sight of the landing-place of Carraori, which, Butshead afterward learned, was the name of the isle of women.

The chanting of the approaching warriors had been heard. At least it was apparent that the Macuregai were expected, for the beach was lined with scores of women who, at first impression, were stalwart warriors. The sight of them filled Butshead with amazement and the men of the *Fearless* with a kind of awe that presently gave place to admiration.

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For at close quarters they were women without doubt—but such women! They were tall, straight, muscular. They were in gala attire, like the Macuregai, and likewise armed. About their loins they wore short skirts of woven grass, heavily fringed. Their breasts were protected by circular metal shields, which might or might not have been of gold. As the *canoas* approached nearer they waved their spears and began to chant the same song that the Macuregai had made familiar to the Englishmen's ears.

The understanding was that the white men should not land, but at the command of Gorges the boats drew nearer for a better view of this strange spectacle. Butshead entered protest and Taruma, rising in the leading canoe, made a sign to them to cease rowing; but Gorges—and his men, too—pretended not to hear or see either warning.

Then the women saw the white men, and they had never seen white men before. It was woman's fatal curiosity that resulted in a calamity.

In the center of the vast group on the beach, upon a kind of dais, with shafts like those of a litter, sat a very aged but stately woman who could be no other than the queen, Aterima. She herself stood up and stared at the fair-haired men in the boats. Then, as the whole flotilla drifted in the inshore waters, Queen Aterima made a speech to King Caribana, who vociferously protested. When he had finished, Taruma rose in his *canoa* and he, also, spoke warmly.

At this Queen Aterima grew angry. She even sneered. As Butshead afterward discovered these women owed allegiance to no overlord and resented the mention of the very name and authority of Topiawari of Aromaia. This she followed up by saying that her people desired to look more closely upon the strangers with faces like the ancient sun-gods.

Caribana conferred with Taruma and glanced over his followers and those of Butshead, or Gorges, who seemed more in command. The Indians outnumbered the whites more than five to one. Very well! Caribana made a gesture of acquiescence to the will of Aterima and it was made clear to the whites that they would have the privilege of landing but not that of sharing in any of the ceremonies. These had become strict and sacred by long usage.

BUT IS not the intention of the present recorder to describe in any detail what happened on the isle of Carraori that night. It can be done briefly. Let it suffice that the result was the first of many disasters attending an ill-considered and ill-managed expedition.

The moment the Indians and the white men landed the latter were surrounded by the women warriors of Aterima's island. The Indians were practically cold-shouldered. Even Caribana, their king, who immediately attended the aged queen, found that Aterima's whole interest and all her questions concerned these fair-faced mortals, of whom she and her people had never heard even a rumor. From that moment the enmity of the Macuregai toward the white men, allayed for a time by Taruma, was renewed and grew every moment.

Taruma looked on with a sad face, but silent. His position as nephew and heir of the greatest ruler of the Orenoqueponi counted for nothing in this strange colony. Gorges and his men were in their element, grinning and jesting, finding as much interest in these women as the women did in them.

Butshead, despite his growing fear of consequences, could not himself escape the curiosity and unwelcome attentions of the warrior women. He was young, fair of face and hair—a thing of marvel to these women. One, a truly handsome young woman who could not have been more than twenty, went so far as to examine his hand and touch the skin of his bronzed cheek. Fergus, at his elbow, groaned and whispered:

"Eh, lad! Trust the deevil when a' else fails to find a woman to spill the fat in the fire."

They presently entered the village of the Amazons, and here, to the white men's amazement, they found that men—young, middle-aged and old—did all the menial service. The women were their "lords."

In the center of the square a great fire was burning, and around it miserable-looking males were busy cooking as for a great feast. Aterima's dais was set up on one side of this fire and around her ranged her warriors. Caribana's seat was placed directly opposite and around him were grouped his warriors. The white men were given seats in the foregound.

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Darkness had now fallen and by the glowing fire a great feast was held, the now familiar liquor—brewed from a palm—being circulated freely, the women drinking cup for cup with the men.

Shortly after that the new moon shyly appeared from behind the crest of a palm. At that all rose and chanted the love-song. Then, still standing, but silent, Aterima made a signal to this woman and that and bade each choose her mate.

To a man the whites were chosen at once, Butshead himself being among the first. When there were no more white men available, a woman chose one of the handsomest of Caribana's warriors. He did not respond. Upon the Indians there fell a strange silence, broken rather violently when the warrior who had been chosen after the white men suddenly turned and buried his spear in the breast of one of Gorges' men, called Forsyth.

That was the end of one scene and the beginning of another. Scroop, without a moment's reflection, drew his pistol and shot the Indian dead. Next instant all was confusion. A pitched battle was on between Gorges' men and Caribana's.

"To the boats! To the boats!" yelled Butshead, and for once the rascally crew had sense enough to obey.

But now the fury of Caribana's men was loosened. The retreat to the boats—but a short run—was a frightful *mêlée*. With his own eyes Butshead saw three of his comrades drop and double that number of Caribana's men. Only one lucky circumstance saved the whites from utter extermination. The women took a hand, not against the fair-faced men but in rage against those who opposed their preference. With their help, Butshead, Gorges, Taruma and such as survived the sudden battle gained the boats and pushed off.

Five minutes later the two ship's boats were half a mile from the scene. From the sounds that came on the still night it was apparent that the men and women warriors were still fighting ashore. There were no signs of pursuit. A brief count showed that Gorges' company had lost four men killed and there were several wounded aboard the two boats. Butshead put his head between his hands and groaned—

"God help Barbary and his men when Caribana returns to Macuregai—after this!"

"Wimmin!" muttered Fergus, who had escaped without a scratch even.

TO BE CONTINUED

TO A FORTY-FOUR

by GEORGE GATLIN

FRIEND of the old days, the red days, my free days,
Most prized of my treasures, you old-time forty-four;
You hang, six-notched and deadly, trigger-tied, and ready,
Though the old hip-shootin' *hombres* are riding in no more.

Friend of the new days, effete days, my last days,
No killers show six-guns as in the old, red West.
You hang, man-sized and heavy, old-fashioned now, already,
For the boxed-up automatic can be toted in one's vest.

You of my old friends, my true friend, my tried friend;
No misused, shining Colt's-gun for the moving-picture plays;
You hang, sand-scratched and steady, lightly oiled and ready,
Fit tribute from a rider to his friend of desert days.

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That Woman

by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "The Rabbit in the Bresh-Pile, "Tennessee Holman, Gentleman," etc.

MOUNTAINEER BILL APPERSON rose from the supper-table, stepped to the high, smoked mantel, and took from it his pipe. As he filled it, he watched his ten-year-old son as the boy greedily devoured his third leg of young squirrel. Then Buddy wiped his mouth on one of the sleeves of his faded cotton shirt, went to his feet and picked up a little ball of sweetgum wax from the red-flowered oilcloth table-cover, and with the other hand straightened his bed-ticking suspender. He had but one suspender. It was fastened to his brown jeans trousers in the middle in front and in the middle behind, and it drew his trousers awry. Buddy hadn't any mother to do things for him. He had been without a mother for four years. But he hadn't forgotten her. She made quite the brightest of the golden spots in his memory.

And yet, he was almost supremely happy. His father saw that the larder was always full, and down beside the creek there was a great sweetgum tree that furnished all the wax he wanted to chew.

Bill Apperson shook his pipe and drawled:

"It's lonesome here for us, Buddy; ain't it? And it's hard on us to haf to do all o' the cookin', and all o' the washin', and all o' the sewin' and patchin'. I'm a goin' to marry ag'in, Buddy. I'm a goin' to marry tomorrow, and git a wife for myself and a mother for you."

Now that it was out, he felt relieved; for weeks he had been dreading this moment. Buddy drew himself up quickly. His gaze narrowed with resentment.

"You and me's been putty good friends for a long time, pap," he said meaningly.

"One o' the Blackfern Mountain Hensons," Apperson went on uneasily. "She's a good woman, Buddy. Twenty-eight, not much younger'n me, and a widder without children. I'll bring her home somewhar nigh the middle o' the day tomorrow; and when she comes, Buddy, you call her 'mother.'"

"Call her 'mother'!" clipped the boy. "I'd see her to the devil fust! Put that in yer pipe and smoke it, pap." After a moment of thoughtfulness, he continued: "I reckon I'll treat that woman right, a pervidin' she'll treat me right; but I won't never call her somepin' what she ain't. 'At's all I got to say about it, pap."

Bill Apperson walked slowly to the front doorway and sat down. He and Buddy had been good friends. He loved the boy, Nan's boy; but he loved home, too, and home was so very barren without a woman in it. Four years he had waited; surely, that were a sufficient respect for the memory of his first wife.

His chief trouble was that Buddy had Nan's eyes, and he couldn't bear their looks of reproach.

Night had fallen thickly when Apperson

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rose from the doorstep. He had come to a decision; he would consult only his own wishes, in regard to his second marriage. Buddy would soon overcome his dislike of a stepmother, he believed.

So on the following morning, big and silent Bill Apperson went with the "Blackfern Mountain" Henson to the cabin of old Preacher Longley Thrash, and there he married her. She was a rather pretty woman; she was soft-eyed, gentle-mannered, buxom and healthy-looking. Apperson didn't take his son with him. He didn't dare! Had he taken Buddy, there would have been no wedding.

The newly mated pair came home shortly before noontime, and Mary Apperson that was Mary Henson forgot that she was a bride, rolled her sleeves to her elbows and went to putting the cabin's tumbled interior into a semblance of order. Her proud husband slipped out of his best clothing and into overalls, and hurried out to his clearing to work in the young corn.

Buddy was nowhere in evidence, but Bill Apperson gave little attention to that fact; the boy was always somewhere in the woods, except at night and at meal-time.

An hour after his father and his father's wife came, Buddy stole out of his hiding-place in a laurel thicket, and peered toward the cabin. Boyish curiosity and the tempting odor of frying bacon were responsible for that.

He walked softly, barefoot, up to the back door and looked slyly in. Mary Apperson saw him; she dropped a pan and went toward him with her arms outstretched.

"Is this here," she drawled smilingly, "my boy?"

One of Buddy's big-toes thrust itself savagely into the sand.

"Not by a—— sight," he clipped.

The woman's smile faded. She knew now why Bill Apperson's talk of his son had been almost mysterious.

"Buddy," she said softly, "I'd give anything in the world ef only ye'd like me. Won't ye try? I cain't never be happy here ef ye don't."

Buddy shifted his home-grown chewing-gum to the other side of his mouth, and elevated his tilted, freckled nose. His well-meaning stepmother eyed him sadly.

"Would ye mind," she said finally, "a goin' up into the clearin' to tell yer pap 'at dinner will be ready for him by the time he can come and wash his hands for it?"

The lad turned slowly from the doorway. Five minutes later he confronted his sire with this—

"She said for you to hustle yerself on to the house for dinner," sourly, "ef ye want any."

Bill Apperson dropped his hoe and mopped his perspiring face with a blue bandanna. Then he put his sun-burned hands on his hips and looked hard at the youthful insubordinate.

"Who," he demanded, "said for me to come to dinner?"

"She. That woman."

"Who?" narrowly.

Apperson, as are most men of the mountains, was fiery of temper. One of his big, earth-stained hands went toward an apple-tree that stood near by, and came back gripping the large end of a long watersprout.

"Who?" he repeated sharply.

"She. That woman," Buddy answered again, undaunted.

Never in anger had his father, his friend, put even the weight of a finger upon him.

It was then that Bill Apperson the hot-headed did the thing that he still regrets. The sprout swished through the air and came down across the lad's shoulders, and it left a red welt.

Buddy didn't move so much as an eyelash. But his face went deathly white. One could have counted his freckles easily in that cataclysmic moment. For him the whole world was lost.

"Who?" growled Apperson.

"That——fool woman ye brung here from the Blackfern," said Buddy, his voice bleak, "and how many more times do I haf to tell ye?"

Once more the sprout was raised. But this time it didn't fall. Bill Apperson caught himself. He threw down the switch, picked up his hoe and went off toward the cabin.

While he washed his hands, his wife called the boy. There was no answer. Again and yet again she called, and still she had no answer. Then Apperson told her everything.

And then "that woman" sat down and sobbed.

UNTIL sundown of that day Buddy Apperson trudged here and there, through the silent woods. His father, whom other men called a brave and an absolutely fearless man, had struck him.

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When his own father became a coward, there was nothing that was good. But he didn't shed a single tear. His grief was of the kind that dazes and benumbs, growing greater and greater with fuller realization, and not a tearful grief.

Twilight found him, standing before the much-hacked sweetgum tree beside the creek. It seemed more than ever like a friend to him now, in this his extremity. He turned his gaze upward along the heavy smooth bole. Then he became aware of the fact that something bright set on a slate-rock among the leaves at his feet, and he bent over to see what it was.

It was a covered tin pail of food. Bill Apperson had told his wife of the sweetgum tree, and she had placed it there for him, so that he would find it. It was still warm.

Hungry as he was, Buddy Apperson took up a stone and with it crushed the pail and everything that was in it. Then he went down the creek and to old Tom Shiver's place, crept into the loft of the log barn, and, two hours afterward, went to sleep. Shiver found him the next morning, took him to his cabin and fed him, learned the truth little by little and begged him to go back to his father. But Buddy refused stoutly.

A week passed, and it was a long, long week to the boy. He spent the nights in barns, and now and then found a meal at some neighbor's house. For the rest of his food, he had apples and peaches and berries. Three times during those seven days he paid a visit to his friend the sweetgum tree, and each time he had found there a covered tin pail filled with good things to eat. These pails met with the same fate that the first had met with.

Not once did his father or his stepmother see him during that week. Bill Apperson searched everywhere for his son, and called himself hoarse daily, but the lad cunningly evaded him.

And then the longing for home became so strong that Buddy decided to see it—just to see it; he wouldn't go in. So he crept to a point within a hundred yards of the cabin and peered cautiously through a clump of sheep-laurel. It seemed very still there. It seemed even more silent than the woods. The sun was almost straight over his head, but there was no smoke coming from the kitchen flue.

But the front door, he saw, was standing open. He crept closer and yet closer, and soon he had reached the split-paling gate. He looked through it, and saw his father sitting, slumped like a sick man, in a home-made rocker in the front room.

For the first time since the fatal day, tears came to the lad's eyes. He had tried hard to kill his love for his father, but he knew now that he hadn't even begun to do it. He slipped the gate open, and permitted his feet to take him toward the cabin.

Bill Apperson raised his head as the boy crossed the creaking floor of the narrow porch. His sober eyes held steadily to the boy's eyes, but he didn't speak. Buddy saw that the face of his sire was drawn and pale, that his cheeks were a little hollow.

Buddy entered the room and stood fingering his single suspender. Still the big hill-man didn't speak. But his son did—

"Is anything the matter wi' ye, pap?" in the gravest apprehension.

"A good deal, son," with a queer calmness. He went on, in the same strangely quiet manner: "Buddy, you ain't never disobeyed me but wunst. I don't want ye to disobey me now——"

"I won't," Buddy blurted eagerly. "I promise ye, pap."

Apperson nodded and continued—

"Son, take my knife off o' the mantel thar, and go out in the woods, and cut me a hick'ry wythe four feet long."

Buddy's heart sank. The apple-tree sprout hadn't been enough; his father was going to whip him with a stronger, tougher switch! He knew very well that there would hardly be life left in him when that wythe was worn out over his body.

And yet, Buddy climbed upon a chair and got his father's knife, went to the woods and came back promptly with a hickory switch *five* feet long.

He stepped across the threshold without a flinching movement.

"Here ye are, pap," he said evenly.

Then he saw, and he caught his breath in wonderment.

Bill Apperson had taken off his shirt, and belted his corduroy trousers to his naked body; he knelt on the floor, with his bare back and his head bent, in waiting.

"What—what's the matter, pap?" cried his little son.

Apperson didn't raise his head when he answered.

"I hit you, Buddy—Nan's boy," he

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choked. "Now take that hick'ry wythe and beat me for a bein' a —— coward like I was. Gi' me ——, son. Cut the blood out o' my back. You said you'd never disobey me no more, and a' Apperson never lies ner breaks a promise. Git at it, Buddy, and be shore to gi' me ——. Waitin's hard."

Buddy had been proud that he was an Apperson, an Apperson who never lied or broke his word. But now—surely, Bill Apperson did not realize the extreme difficulty of the position in which he had placed the boy; had he known, he probably would have died before he would have done it.

"Git at it, son," he repeated.

Buddy's face was white now. His lips jerked pitifully. Then he relaxed his hold on the butt of the switch, and it clattered to the floor.

"I couldn't never do it, pap," he declared brokenly.

With that he hastened forward and put a reverent hand on the great, dark head. Bill Apperson straightened, there on his knees, and put his big arms around Nan's boy. Buddy held back the tears, a thing his father was not wholly able to do, and whispered:—

"Whar is yer wife at, pap?"

"Gone," somewhat thickly.

"Gone whar?"

"Home," said Bill Apperson. "She's left me."

"'Count o' me?" asked Buddy.

"She said she didn't want to separate you and me, son. She said she shore couldn't keep you away from yore home. She left so's you could come back. There's never been a better woman made, Buddy. She was a blessin' and a song and a joy in the house——

"When she left, I quarreled at her," Apperson went on guiltily, but very penitently. "I'm awful sorry I done that. I wanted her to wait; I told her you'd come back to us, maybe. But she wouldn't wait. It was that w'ich I quarreled at her about. And shore I don't believe she'll ever come back to me—to us—now, Buddy."

"I bet ye she does," the lad replied hopefully. "I bet ye she does, pap."

"No," said Apperson. "No, she won't—atter I'd said the hard things I'd said, she turned back to me and kissed me.

"'I'll kiss ye good-by, Bill,' she says, 'acause it's good-by for all time. Thar's the boy,' she says; 'and then, you've fussed at me, Bill—and I won't live with a man 'at fusses at me. I don't haf to,' she says. And so I know she won't never come back to us, Buddy. Well, we lived afore she come to us, and we'll live now that she's gone. But——"

He went to his feet and picked up his blue chambray shirt.

"But I wisht to God we had her back," he finished. "Acause a better woman 'an her never walked over the face o' the earth in shoe-leather."

BUDDY'S bed was in the cabin's loft, and that night he lay awake for hours and absently watched stars pass, one by one, across a knothole in the roof, while he thought and thought. Finally a plan took form in his mind, and he went to sleep smiling.

When breakfast was over on the following morning, Buddy Apperson hastened out of the cabin and went rapidly away on the Blackfern trail. An hour later he stood before the cabin of old Matthew Henson, on Blackfern Creek. The front door was open, and there were no dogs in sight. Buddy walked up to the door and looked in.

The woman was in the front room sitting beside a small table, sewing. For the first time Buddy noted that she was pretty. But she seemed rather sad about the eyes. He took off his hat, walked softly in and halted close beside her knee.

She looked up slowly.

"Good mornin', Buddy," she said.

"Howdy," said the boy. "Pap and me wants you to come back."

"I reckon," murmured Mary Apperson that was Mary Henson, "I'd better not."

But even Buddy could see that she wanted to go! If only Bill Apperson hadn't quarreled at her!

The lad went down to his knees—down to his, an Apperson's, knees—there beside her.

"Please, mother—*mother*."

The word was magic. She kissed it on his lips, and hugged him, and rose.

"As soon as I can find my bonnet, honey-boy."

Standing in the doorway with his eyes on the Blackfern trail, Bill Apperson saw them coming, hand in hand, and went out to meet them. Out to meet the boy that was his own boy, and the woman who was a song and a blessing and a joy in the house.

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The Diversion of a Monographic Professor

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Three Bankers Afloat," and "The Wandering Son."

PROF. D. RASWELL DATON loved many things, and he could look across the lecture-room of his university and watch youths develop into men with strong minds and opinions set toward the right; or he could sit for hours with many candle-power of light directed upon an insect's dissected body, studying certain features of organism; these studies, however, in or near the locale of science and laboratory interested but did not thrill his soul.

He had watched the unresting sea, the Great Lakes and the wide Gulf Stream, the heaving Pacific, and the Mississippi River, and he had discoursed upon water and its varying moods, with artistic love of light and shade, color and motion. He knew wilderness, too, from the fire-worn stone of the North Shore, to the dark, wet cypress brakes and islanded swamps of Chaffeli, and the marshes of the coastal plain.

He had ranged mountains, and had measured the years of the Adirondacks and Laurentians, looked down from the beautiful crest of the Blue Ridge and watched fugitives from justice crossing through Cumberland Gap. America, North America, was ample for a lifetime of geographical study, geological observation, and outdoor wanderings—he said, in his youth, and the years of his life and his enjoyment of all things proved his judgment at the beginning.

All he asked was to do his work which he laid out for himself to do. The course of his lectures in his university was enlivened by the added resources of a full, happy, and comprehensive mind. He illustrated "the wine-colored sea" of Homer, by a quotation from Ruskin and his own observation of the shadows of great ships and of waves themselves. He read into classics illustrations from the homes of the young men whom he interested and whose souls he fixed in stedfast respect for the heroes of past ages, for the seeing poets of old, for languages that throb with the energy and beauty of minds now long dead.

He added from time to time, a book of his own to the resources of mankind. His monograph on "Needles of Pine" on "Natural Artistry," "Mountains in Men's Hearts," "The Sea's Lessons," and "Streams That Obey the Law," described the bent of his mind. If a man's heart had thrilled at the spectacle of a lone fire-weed in bloom in a dark glen, illuminated by a sunbeam—Prof. Daton thrilled with him, and added thrills to a receptive mood.

Then Prof. Daton discovered the desert; one of the professors in another university had seen and described the vast bowl of southern California, Arizona, and a part of Nevada—Death Valley and its environs. A little tinge of jealousy twisted Prof. Daton's heart; this other man had seen the desert, and set it to words, like a symphony, or a song, or an epic. He read the pages of his rival with a feeling that he had

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been deprived of the pleasure of putting into words that wonderful tune in shape and color which Nature had played.

For years, Prof. Daton had given himself no rest. He had written books from notes which he made by the journalful. All day long he attended to his university duties, and in the evening he applied himself to the compilation of his previous Summer's observations, and added a monograph to the wonderful series which were the second monument to his industry, the young men of his classes being that other monument, built from their hearts and souls outward.

When he read the story of the desert, its various phenomena from the carving of stone by wind-blown sand to the wash of cloudbursts through long slopes of benches, and the slinking of the coyote, the startling wonder of pretty flowers, the shiftiness of the native birds, the muddiness of the Colorado, he told himself that nothing remained for him to write about there; so it was a place he could go to and wander around carefree and indolent, taking the leisurely, aimless, noteless, workless days of play to which he knew he was entitled by the years of his thrifty use of time.

He could not afford to miss the desert phenomena; yet he need not make monographic use of it. All that could be told about the desert was told in his friendly rival's book—beautifully and colorfully told, and it was not possible to improve upon it. Before he went, Prof. Daton declared to himself that nothing had been omitted, not an item of genuine interest.

So he laid his plans of approach to the desert. He debated in his mind whether to go into the desert from the east or the west, or down from the north. He chose the latter course, because that was suggested by a Government report, which he read. The map showed that up the Sevier River in Utah, and over the divide, down into the Colorado Basin and thus into Arizona would enable him to see with his own eyes some of the remarkable strata which geologists had not yet determined were pre-Cambrian quartzite, though it was the oldest in the Navajo country, occuring in the famous half square-mile on Quartzite Creek. Of course, it might be pre-Moenkopi, or Permian—anyhow, Prof. Daton could look into that particular question and possibly think something worth while about it.

At the end of the railroad, on the Sevier, he found a satisfactory saddle-horse and pack-pony. He loaded the pony, while an appreciative little party of spectators watched him—but, even if he was a learned professor, in appearance, he had been so far and camped so much that he could handle horses and throw a good hitch.

He rode away, and if any one up the trail wondered about him, a polite silence was maintained regarding his intentions and ideas. Bets were even, behind his back, that he was a prospector, a professor, or a detective on his way down into the Henry Mountains by way of the Emery Fork. Some considerable sums of money were walking around and riding around in the Henry Mountains, to be had for the shooting. The shooting, however, involved the condition of shooting first.

Sure enough, Prof. Daton turned up the Emery Fork; he went up the same trail as the old Hole-in-the Wall crowd followed at times, and nobody behind who heard that he was going that way happened to remember that the Geological Survey Reconnaissance had gone through that path, too. So far as Prof. Daton was concerned, he had a blue-print of a sketch "trial map" which a friend of his in the Department down at Washington gave him, and he asked no questions, needed no advice, and filled his water-bags at the proper places.

He found the stones of the land all that he had hoped for or desired or dreamed. People who have lost rock in any quantities or sizes, from opal pebbles to granite miles-square and of vast height and unmeasured depth, could find them anywhere down in that country, or at least somewhere. Prof. Daton, who had rambled among mountains, had never seen this kind of country. His curiosity was ample, but it was satisfied; every day he sallied forth with a new supply, and by night he was full of satisfaction to the brim—but his geological experiences were only a repetition of previous observers, and he arrived at Col. Hite's Crossing without a single new experience, speaking as a matter of scientific topography, geography, and geology.

Even when he rode up into the Quartzite Creek country, and gazed on the dark gray quartzite cañon walls, and verified the ribbons of black, massy hematite, the muscovite fragments, the layers of flattened

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pebbles of slate, the cubical, diamond, prism, and joint planes with glistening surfaces, he realized that it had been all described before him and he need not bother to write a word or make a sketch, except for his own personal gratification.

And yet, if it was all described territory; if the land had been over-run with scientists; if even they had grown quick with feeling at the things they witnessed, relics of volcanic wars, meteoric conflict, seas that have evaporated, storms that have never been recorded; yet he, too, trembled with the fervor of a land so beautiful, so wonderful, so rigorous, so divine that it could never be plowed or converted into any purpose by man, except to gaze upon it, and tap the bells of the ages, to hear them ring.

PROF. DATON'S knowledge of men was to a large extent limited to the youths of his classes and to the fellows of similar or varied letters, and, to his knowledge, he had not read an unscientific book or description or adventure in twenty years. But back in his rash youth he had read something or other which had stirred in his soul an unquenched longing for adventure—and he was glad to feel that it had been a proper emotion, which he had directed through proper chanbels of scientific enjoyment to the higher or at least more appropriate emotions of mankind.

The professor left nothing undone in his wanderings to insure their full success. If he carried a microscope, a prospector's pick, extra water-bags, he also carried a rifle for game and a scalpel to dissect it, and he had a butcher knife with which to convert the muscles into fuel for the purpose of appeasing his hunger, or to keep his own physical fires burning.

He stopped at a pasture-bottom ranch to purchase some supplies. He tendered a twenty-dollar gold-piece in payment and received some silver dollars in change, according to the price agreed upon. He had taken the piece of gold from a leather belt, and the dark-breed Mexican who observed the act blinked his eyes.

Alfaro Portatono was not, however, a desperate, daring Mexican. He was just a peaceable person of the type known as a greaser. Admixtures of deferential strains had made him obsequious, envious and pitiable. But when the white man, with his supplies, had ascended an arroyo to a plateau and was out of sight, Alfaro mounted a pony and rode out into a lonesome recess and, by a certain call, attracted a female from a nearby mountain.

To her he told what he had seen, describing the visitor and mentioning the belt of gold. The female, part squaw, part Mex, part white, slipped away from the place gracefully and rapidly, and Alfaro returned to his little pasture.

So there appeared on the horizon of Prof. Daton three horseman, who approached him late in the day, among the vast upheavals and slack washes, when the thin air, and the yellow haze, like gold, and the purple skies, and the blue cañon shadows, and the horizon of a flaming red cloud, capping a dark-blue, lightning-desperate thunder-head were particularly glorious.

It still lacked an hour of sunset, but that was a precious hour. It was a precious day. Never again would Prof. Daton be witness to that particular sunset—and every one knows that no two sunsets have been alike, from the dawn of worlds, nor will be, till the day of doom, when all the glories of all the sunrises will be seen in one vast display, and when the light of worlds will go out into unimaginable blackness of night in one sunset terror of the end of time.

Three men rode into the scene, which Prof. Daton had anticipated would be his own, undisturbed. There was the thunder-storm, and the probability of a cloudburst, and he might never again have an opportunity to watch the birth of a cloudburst in that brim of the desert desolation. Why do ignorance and lack of feelings break in upon the sacred moments of thoughtful, cultured, exquisitely emotional scientists?

"Howdy," one of the new-comers greeted Prof. Daton, with a drawl.

For an instant, Daton contemplated quietly ignoring the greeting. The voice was ignorant, the tone was abominable, the word was a corruption. He looked, and then he was glad he looked. It would have been too bad to have that spectacle of three men pass by unseen.

The speaker, obviously the most important of the three, was a long-limbed, smooth-shaven, blue-eyed man, riding a lank, tawny horse. The horse and the rider loomed like a telegraph-pole against the sky-line. The man's throat, with a red silk handkerchief around it, his long torso, in

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its dark-blue shirt, his gray trousers and white Angora chaps, made him a spectacle worthy of the desert.

One of his companions was an Indian, almost black-faced, wrinkled and hunched up, with legs spindling and like charred bone where they showed through ragged old overalls, yet he had wrapped around him, over one shoulder and under one arm, a blue and red blanket, with geometrical designs, which instantly marked the weaver as an ethnological specimen.

The third man was a water-eyed, blue-irised youth, who seemed scarcely twenty years of age. The youth was lank, like the larger man, but there was a stiffness and hardness in his bearing which reminded Prof. Daton of something or other; he tried in vain to recall what.

The three men all had revolver holsters hanging from their belts. They all had rifle scabbards with rifles in them—weapons with worn stocks and provided for by rows and rows of cartridges in leather belts, the Indian's belt being all beaded and fanciful.

"Good day, sir," Prof. Daton nodded, and then conducting a psychological experiment with a cool humor he waved his hand toward the sun, the storm cloud, the stone land, and all the wonderful scene, and added, "Isn't that beautiful!"

"It is, if that's what you came to see," the tall horseman admitted. "And sunsets is a good business to mind, if it's yours, in this part the country."

Prof. Daton felt and resented the invitation to mind his own business and the implication that he had other designs.

"I think possibly, that, as a matter of inference, sunsets are my exclusive concern—and none of yours!" he said.

It was a retort courteous, and it was not missed in meaning by the leader of the three, who grinned. His long, lean face opened to a cavernous slit, in which a cave-dweller might almost have built a mystery den for ethnologists to speculate about in the future ages. It showed a few scattered teeth, a purple-red tongue— and an expression which, the more it seemed to laugh became the more horrible and menacing.

"It's the color o' gold, all right!"

The man waved toward the sun, and toward the long shafts of sunshine, hazy and luminous like flying gold-dust, which reached across the blue depths of the cañons leading in three directions from their feet.

"Yeh! Gold!" the water-eyed youth sneered, and, sneering, showed a line of pearl-white teeth like a cat's, and just as narrow, with obvious canines in the corners.

"*Garump!*" the Indian seemed to say.

Prof. Daton had his eye-glasses in his hand; they were slightly amber, to protect his eyes from the hot glare and the searing wind of that Summer heat of the desert. He drew a handkerchief and carefully wiped the lens of each tortoise bow. He stroked his mustache, looking at the shafts of light, through which he saw the effect of colored rocks, though he could not distinguish the stone; but over and below the shafts he saw the shapes of strata and read the touch of ages.

To his mind the situation was entrancing. His friend who had written about the desert had missed something. The casual mention of Indian huts down the Colorado, the scolding about a development company's invasion, the dwelling on the loneliness and the impossibility of really peopling that desolation, insufficiently pictured this thing which he was himself experiencing.

These three humans, with their great revolvers, their obvious rifles, their grim stare, and their hinting "It's the color o' gold, all right!" were the dominant features of the landscape. Prof. Daton recalled the Summer he put in in the Dakota Bad Lands digging out the bones of prehistoric monsters; they, too, had fought in wildernesses, the way men do.

"And there!" Daton pointed with a long, delicately adjusted finger. "There's the exact color of a greenback!"

The youth and the Indian turned to look, but the leader of the three suddenly scowled and his hand dropped to the butt of a revolver, like a frightened bird's wing unsheathing for flight.

"Come!" he growled, impatiently. "Y' got a belt o' eagles there——"

DATON raised his face to look at the man. They were hold-ups, now, without a doubt. They had come to him to rob him. The Mexican had told them, and his foolish abstraction had gotten him into this mess. He glanced regretfully at the sunset. He was losing a lot of it, at the most interesting, vivid, varied moment. He scowled, thinking of his loss. The bandits were so inopportune!

"You mean—?" the professor said

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"Shell out!"

"Oh—I perceive, now! Yours is not the pursuit of the evanescent consolations of the colorful atmosphere; you seek the refined and tangible coin of the realm——"

"Now yer talkin'!" the man laughed. "Hey, Panto!"

"You—" the watery-eyed youth turned with a savage snarl at the man. "What y' call the name for, 'Quartzite Sam'?"

The man gave a quick glance at the youth.

"Aw—what's he know?" he shrugged his shoulders. "Bug-sharp—bone-digger— sceneries-yapper—all them kind of things!"

"Here's the belt!" Prof. Daton interrupted them. "It's mine, and you've no right to it. But please don't make me miss this sunset!"

The two white men laughed aloud, and the Indian stared in wonder, for his knowledge of English was limited; otherwise he might have understood the victim better than his companions.

Prof. Daton tossed his belt, and the man caught it. Daton turned his back on them, and after a moment's hesitation, they turned and rode away. Their hesitation was as though they would have liked to speak again, but they were bandits, and they were dismissed. They rode away, and Daton walked around a point, as though to be rid of them, and to see the view better.

They had accomplished their business; they touched up their horses to be home before it was too dark—and then a crack like a granite crag rived by frost echoed in the desert silence. The big man fell off his horse. The youth turned like a flash with his pistol coming up, but he looked in the wrong direction. He lost a precious second, and he, too, fell at the next shot of the air-splitting rifle. The Indian, digging the big brass wheel of his spur into the pony sought to escape, but he was killed within three jumps.

Prof. Daton emerged from behind the strata of Chuska-sandstone along the layer of Tchachi shale shelf, or bench, and went cautiously out to the interesting ethnological exhibit lying there stark upon the bare lava and ash which happened to remain where they had fallen, to serve as the bed of the three bad-men. When the three horsemen had scrutinized their captive they had thought they recognized his utterly tenderfoot type. They had made the great mistake of their lives on that account. They had neither searched him nor examined his outfit because it had not occured to them that a student of scenery might also be a right good marksman.

First of all, Prof. Daton returned the belt containing his gold to his waist. He assured himself that the three were quite dead, one with his back cut in two, one with a bullet through his heart, the other—the Indian—with a bullet almost full-length through his body.

Prof. Daton remembered then of what the watery-eyed youth had reminded him; it was of his classes back in the university; when some youth or other was in a mood expectant of mischief, he would sit taut and nervously ready.

"Precisely!" the professor nodded. "The correlation of human beings is obvious in the meaner phases of their activities—um-m."

He turned and walking to a projection, sat and watched the sunset; and it was so wonderfully beautiful a sunset that Prof. Daton forgot his ethnological experience in the rapture of the tints and solid colors that marked the glory of an expiring day.

In the night, with stars dappling the purple gloom, he went down to the spring which was marked on his blue-print and made camp. He was up to enjoy the dawn from the same eminence, and then he rode out and found the horses of the three men eating bunch-grass, which he could turn to dust between his thumb and finger, but which they enjoyed. He lashed the bodies of the three desperadoes on their own saddles, and drove on all that day under a cloud that rained steadily; but not one drop of water touched him, or fell upon the arid stones or sands.

He watched that marvelous storm; water dropping in sheets and pillars, but each drop absorbed by the thirsting air; and the moisture rising from the heated stones to become cloud again. When night fell, he camped in another cañon, and in sand dug a hole from which the horses drank, a cupful at a time till they were no longer thirsty. He drank from another hole, in the same way. Then he slept at a little distance from the gruesome packs. Before dawn he was on his way again.

That day was hot and torrid, withering him up. He saw the mirage, and tested it from a height and from the ground—and at the ground level he saw the rolling waters coming up within arm's length of his face.

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Still he plodded, a wiry, invincible, imperturbable little man. He walked with his strange train into Mesa Springs, where in the twilight he was a spectacle, with his tortoise-shell eye-glasses and his three dead men.

They crowded around him, and demanded to know what had happened, and how, and where?

"The Indian I do not know," Prof. Daton explained. "But the youth was Panto, and the other Quartzite Sam—a familiar geological term applied to a questionable desert ethnological personage."

"That's right!" a tall, grim, antelope kind of a man said, hearing the words. "I reckon that's what you done to him—er—Professor! You shore saved us something. Did they kill each other?"

"No, sir. I did it."

"Eh? You—— You—— For law's sake! What's this country comin' to? You!" the man demanded. "I be'n sheriff three terms an' I never seen the beat. You—— How come hit?"

"Why, well, frankly, Mr. Sheriff, they tried to deprive me of the most glorious of sunsets, following a marvelous day. They jeered the gold of the sun's shafts through cañon shadows, and they likened it to—to gold of the mintage. They took my belt of —ah, dross. I am not unaware of the utility of money. At the same time they might have deprived me of an exquisite memory, a glorious reality, a dream of the ages!"

"Yessir, I expect," Sheriff Rancole exclaimed. "Jes' so!"

"And now about these men; you've identified them?" Prof. Daton asked.

"Sure. Yagan Blackface, Quartzite, and Panto!"

"They're all wanted?"

"They was; they ain't much good now. We'll bury 'em——"

"Excuse me," Prof. Daton interrupted him. "I understood that they were bandits, of course; it occurs to me that there should be certain legal formalities——"

"Not killing that kind! You don't wait none, not getting them!" the sheriff hastened to explain.

"You don't catch my meaning," the professor exclaimed, and the sheriff looked with some anxiety at him. "Long ago, I read—it seems to me—a plebeian book which stirred an ambition in my heart. It all returns to me now. Were these men rewarded?"

"Oh, yes sir, Professor! Two thousand four hundred dollars on the big one, a thousand each on the other two, and——"

"It's mine?"

"I expaict."

Prof. Daton stroked his chin. He considered for a minute. Then he nodded with satisfaction.

"Yes, sir!" he mused. "I remember now. I see now—and it's not too late. For a long time—for years—I've recorded facts, careful in my statements as a woman of her honor! Now—now——"

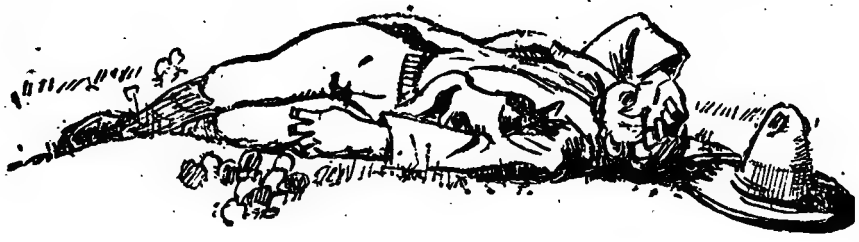
His eyes, freed of their pale-amber spectacles, searched the clear peaks of far mountains, and he forgot the spectators.

"Nature orders things, not human beings!" he whispered. "The desert—ah! It stimulates the imagination. Now—now—now I can rise upon the wings of inspiration. How perfectly idiotic to fancy for a moment even that Prof. VanDyke had exhausted the material for discourse on the American Desert. Dear me!"

He rubbed his hands, and thanked his stars. In orderly array, part by part, feature by feature, historical, psychological, ethnological, locale, exceptions, habits—he saw something for his Winter nights' effort and entertainment.

In due course he added to his increasing series of studies for the learned; to wit—

A Monograph on the Episodic Habits and Nature of "Bad-Men" in the Desert.



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The Invalid

by W. A. Macdonald

Author of "The Little War," "The Last Beacon," etc.

ON THE morning that Joe Bedell killed the nephew of old John Cummins, he swore that he would come back. He swore this over his shoulder with forced breath as he ran, but he shook his fist in the opposite direction because he was too pressed for time to indicate with his hand the objective of his eye. His movements were not co-ordinated, as they say in books.

On the same morning old John Cummins swore that if Joe Bedell ever came back he would certainly kill him. He got up slowly from where he had knelt for the last shot at Joe who just then turned a clump of trees at the shoulder of the hill to safety. Something wet rolled down the wrinkled face and splashed on the butt of the Winchester .45-90. Old John had brought up his nephew from a baby till he was twelve years old. He had taught him to ride; he had taught him to shoot.

Now he struck the back of his hand fiercely against the back of his rifle without feeling pain, and cursed it for a hand that shook. Then, with purposeful face, he trudged back to the house and ordered his one hired man, Freddy Kemp, to saddle and ride for the sheriff and the undertaker.

Joe Bedell had made a mistake. By this he had frustrated his own long and elaborate campaign and had taken from the world one life, which was not the first he had taken. Yet he swore that he would come back. As long as he had reason to suppose that John Cummins' money lay in the safe in the big living-room he would scheme to come back. He had plotted long to get the combination; when he had acquired it he had waited long—for him—for opportunity to use it.

At the very moment of success when he was absorbed in turning the bright knob on the steel door, the boy ran in unexpectedly. The boy stopped short and cried out, and turned wildly from the savage and surprized face, and Joe fired one shot into him as he ran.

When the sheriff arrived John Cummins told the story, trying unsteadily to keep his pipe going, for he was unused to display emotion.

"I hired Joe to come up here to work an' help Freddy out," he explained. "He was here two weeks. Seemed all right. But he was scheming all the time to get that money, and he might 'a' had all I got in the world, the——, if he'd only left my kid. Yesterday I heard the shot—faint. I ran up to the house. When I come in the door I could see Joe, his back to me, workin' at the safe, but I wasn't inside the room then so I couldn't see the kid; he was layin' a little to one side.

"If I had, Sheriff, you could lock me up tonight an' welcome. Joe turned around quick an' saw me an' of course I had him covered then. He stood up with his hands

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over his head an' his back to the window. I walked into the room toward him, an', as I did, he just leaned backward quick, an' fell right through the window. Then I see the boy, lyin' on the floor. The poor little kid."

The moisture of agony glistened on the old man's forehead. He gripped the hot bowl of the pipe in an unheeding hand.

"I grabbed up the rifle an' I run out. But I was terrible shaky. He had quite some start on me an' I missed him twice. I ran after him an' tried again on the run. Then I stopped an' got down on one knee an' took careful aim. I was so anxious I pulled before I was ready; an' then he was gone out o' sight. I couldn't catch him. I watched for him, but he didn't come back. So I went after you, Sheriff. Anything I got you can have if you drag that skunk to a tree."

No one could say that the sheriff didn't try. But weeks came and went and no one saw Joe Bedell. Old John Cummins in his house grew grimmer, and he sent down and doubled the reward he had publicly offered.

One day the sheriff rode up, swung his bulk out of the saddle, and gratefully accepted a tin dipper full of cool well-water.

"Now you better have another man up here to help you and Kemp keep an eye on the place," he recommended. "Freddy ain't much good, John, and you ain't as young as you used to be. Now if Joe Bedell was to come 'round here to break into that safe, an extra man might come in helpful. I can spare you a man, John."

"What you heard, Sheriff?" the old man questioned shrewdly.

"One o' my boys heard Joe Bedell was around," the sheriff answered quietly. "I want to send this man, Crawford, up here."

"No!" said the old man. "I want to get Joe myself."

The sheriff became persuasive.

"Now, John." He lowered his voice.

As the old man listened the refusal died down in his face.

"Well, Sheriff—if you got a good man. But if Joe Bedell comes back——"

His eyes burned in his wrinkled face.

"'Course you want a shot at him, John. Sure you do. But you want an even break—an' Joe is a good many years younger than you. He's a good shot, too. He's quick—quick as I want to meet. An' he don't want no fair fight, John. Now just you let me send you up a man.

"This man I speak of, he'd like to come up here. I told him about Joe killin' the kid, an' it seems he an' Joe had some fracas once an' they don't like each other. Here's my idea——"

The sheriff beamed down confidentially from his kindly height. He was a man white people liked. John Cummins listened, growing less doubtful.

SO IT came about that the sheriff sent up his man, the man named Crawford. After a day's ride from town he appeared, booted and spurred, deeply colored by the sun, an out-of-doors man by all the marks. He turned to and helped Kemp with the work; there was quite a farm, though John Cummins lived here more because he liked the scenery than as a matter of livelihood.

He always had liked it here since he had come from the arid mining country where he had made his pile. He built his house here because the hills had some green upon them. Here he could go out for a day's shooting or fishing; and he enjoyed driving down to Hampton to sell some produce and buy some supplies. Also he had a little business that took him over to Friendship where he went to the bank and to the office of a man named Miller who collected some rents for him.

During such absences Freddy Kemp kept house. Freddy was fairly reliable; but he was not much younger than John Cummins, and he liked very much to go down to Hampton for an occasional spree. It was probable that Joe Bedell had picked up from the free speech of one of these occasions the knowledge of where John Cummins had written down the combination of the safe.

Crawford, the new man, was good company. He had a controlled humor beneath his quiet manner. He appeared to have led an adventurous life. In the evenings he sat before the open fire that was the pride of John Cummins' house and swapped stories with the older men, turning up appropriate anecdotes with a smile at his firm mouth and wrinkles where the firelight struck at the corners of his eyes.

John Cummins harked back to the hardships of his prospecting, and even Freddy Kemp who usually did not talk much except during his visits to Hampton, when he talked a great deal, managed to draw from the reservoir of his past a yarn or two.

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One night he halted abruptly with startled eyes.

"What's the matter, Crawford?"

Old John Cummins stood up, too. Crawford smoothed out the sudden lines that had come into his face, but his right hand he kept pressed against his right side. He tried to laugh.

"Ever have a pain there?" he inquired patting his side.

"I know a feller did," said Kemp taking his pipe from his mouth. "Bad time he had; doc had to cut him up. Name was Jack Thorne, this feller. Doc's name was Blackmer, an' he was a funny feller. 'Twas down in California when I was there. I 'member how it started—jes' like you did he put his hand on his side, an' he near died quick."

Crawford winked at the encouragement.

"Makes you look pale," remarked old John Cummins solicitously. "You better ride down tomorrow to see what the doc says."

Crawford got up, painfully, to look into the mirror. He peered long and carefully, for where it hung on the wall the light reached into it feebly. Finally he lifted it down and found another nail for it where it hung full in the firelight. He saw the reflection of his face and behind it the faces of the anxious Kemp and of John Cummins.

"Will you shut that door?" he asked Kemp quietly without turning. "It's cold here."

He moved over to the couch and lay down, his head propped high against the bolster. In the glass he could still see Kemp as the latter finished closing the door against the night air.

"There," said Cummins, "I been intendin' to put that mirror there where it will get the light from the window an' the fireplace, too."

They were all quiet for a time.

"You were telling about a trip you took," Crawford reminded Kemp.

So Freddy went on with his story.

Kemp and Crawford were standing in front of the house next morning when, without warning, the pain came back. Crawford gasped with it and doubled forward; and the lines deepened in his face. Kemp caught him and kept him from falling.

"Take it easy. Can you walk a little? That's it, go slow," he cautioned and counseled.

He engineered Crawford toward the house, taking his weight against his chest and shoulder. He called to Cummins. Together they eased the stricken man down upon the couch. He lay there, his hand presssed against his side, breathing heavily. After a time he said feebly:

"I reckon I ain't much good. Tell the sheriff."

Then his heavy breathing went on again, laboriously.

Cummins looked at Kemp and Kemp looked at Cummins.

"You got to go after the doctor, Freddy," Cummins said. He took Kemp to one side and they put their grizzled heads together.

"Tell him to bring his ax and saw," whispered Cummins loudly. "He may have to open him up."

He urged Kemp to the door putting a worried hand upon his shoulder.

"Why, Freddy," he exclaimed suddenly. "You look mighty pale yourself. You better take a little drop of Crystal Valley before you go. Here, wait a minute. There, put that into you, then ride like the devil after that doctor."

Kemp hesitated; he knew his weakness. As he looked at the cup the fumes of whisky drifted into his nostrils. Cummins shoved the cup into his hand.

"Drink it up, man, an' get going. An' don't waste no time."

Then he took back the empty cup. Kemp rode his horse 'round to the door.

"Ride, man, ride," cried Cummins.

The other looked at him with eyes already filmed a little by the drink.

"I sure will," he promised, and was gone, galloping down the trail.

Old man Cummins put his pipe meditatively in his mouth, which was a little set, and went back to Crawford.

IT HAPPENED that night that Freddy Kemp, easing himself off a tired horse at Hampton, decided to have one drink before he looked up the doctor. He was tired and thirsty. The memory of the drink of the morning ran strong in his veins. He ran his tongue slowly along his dry lips.

"One'll do me good," he said, huskily.

He dropped the reins over the horse's head and trudged wearily into Doyle's saloon, and saluted the man in the white apron.

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"Hello, Tom."

Tom reached out a good-natured hand. Kemp leaned over the bar and licked his lips again.

"A taste of Crystal Valley, Tom?"

Several hours later Kemp determined obstinately to have one more drink. He didn't remember how many he had had, and he didn't care. One more he was going to have despite anybody. He told the whole room this. He went on to expatiate on the errand that brought him to Hampton. He didn't remember that he had told about this before, and he didn't care; he was certainly going to tell about it now. Whoever he might have told already he was sure they were all either persons of the greatest sympathy and discretion or else they were so low that they didn't count in the world.

He had only regret that the most attentive of all his hearers, a bearded man, very generous in buying whisky, had been obliged to leave so early in the evening. He wept over the departure of this friend. Later, Tom, of the white apron, who was a kindly disposed man, and knew Freddy had ridden a long way, put him safely to bed behind the partition after trying in vain to convey him up-stairs.

MANY MILES on the trail from Hampton, Kemp's bearded and sympathetic friend was riding hard, and beside him rode a figure that in less sinister light might have looked like Joe Bedell.

As the morning sun shouldered over the pines that crowded against the sky a mile back of old John Cummins' house these two lay on their bellies just behind the crest of a green hill approximately five hundred yards from the house which they watched continuously.

"The soup all right?" asked the bearded man shortly.

The dark-faced man beside him nodded grimly.

"I said I was comin' back to thees place," said Joe Bedell.

He drew back his upper lip until his teeth showed, and swore contemptuously at the house that he watched.

"I'll learn the ol' fool not to shoot at Joe Bedell," he muttered still smiling.

The other's hand crushed Joe's arm through his sleeve.

"There he is!"

He rolled sideways lifting the nose of his rifle over the hill. Joe's hand spoiled this move.

"No!" he forbade. "Too far."

They lay waiting like beasts of prey watching the man who came out of the house. It was Cummins, a saddle on his left arm, a rifle swinging in his right hand. Joe laughed noiselessly as Cummins walked briskly to where his horse cropped at the end of a long picket-rope, and laid down the rifle while he saddled the animal. Showing his age a little Cummins climbed on and headed smartly down the trail for Hampton. Joe Bedell rolled over in a convulsion of glee.

"Now, look at heem," he exclaimed over and over. "He's goin' for the doctaire."

The figure receded. At a clump of trees on the Hampton trail it swung away from their sight. They stood up and stretched themselves in the cool morning and picked their way briskly down the hill toward the safe and the sick man. Occasionally they spared a glance to see if John Cummins had turned back.

Crawford lay upon the couch almost as Kemp had last seen him except that his head was now lifted on many pillows. The only door that entered the room was behind the head of the couch. The safe in which Cummins kept his possessions was at the foot. It was a big room, and from Crawford's head to the door was fully twenty feet. But the mirror on the wall before him was so tilted that it reflected the door behind his head clearly.

Crawford took in the details of what it showed. He thought the door quivered. He concentrated his gaze upon the reflection in the mirror. It moved. Very slowly the door opened a crack. There was a pause. It advanced again. Through the aperture the mirror began to form the dark image of a face, that suddenly flung through, hurling the door to one side—Joe Bedell with his bearded partner crowding close behind him.

"The safe!" cried Bedell harshly, and, as the bearded man sprang across the room, lifted his gun-hand toward the couch.

The shot bellowed in the room, flame slashing red through the smoke.

With a high, sibilant intake of breath Joe Bedell, a ghastly sickness in his face, clawed out once at nothing, then sprawling and contorted, hit the floor.

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"Put up your hands," said the man on the couch in a voice like chilled steel.

The bearded one put them up.

When old John Cummins stuck his grizzled head through the doorway fifteen minutes later Crawford, still lying on the couch, comfortably covering his man with an ugly black automatic, was waiting for him to come and tie up the victim.

"You see," explained old John cheerfully to the captive, "it was all a put-up job, as you might say. Mr. Crawford here played off sick, an' I gave Freddy Kemp a drink to start him off when he went down to Hampton, 'cause I knew if Freddy had one he'd have another an' if he had another a few times he'd tell all he knew, an' if he told all he knew at Doyle's probably Joe'd hear about it, he bein' reported to the sheriff as in the vicinity of Hampton at recent date; an' if Joe heard I was here alone with a sick man he might take it into his head to visit me."

The captive relieved his mind, with variations, as Cummins tightened the rope.

"I got my opinion," he said, "of a descendant of an undesirable ancestor that shoots under his arm-pit at an unsuspecting gent behind him what he sees in a mirror."

"That's right," said John. "Express yourself."

He looked at Crawford with a quizzical eye.

"Mr. Taylor—" he began.

"Taylor!" shouted the bearded one.

He temporarily lost command of his voice, and then of his language. In a little while he recovered:

"You're Taylor? The one Joe told me let him down forty feet by shooting through the rope he was on. You're the gunman the sheriffs call when they get mired."

He drew in a long breath, and looked at the huddled heap upon the floor.

"Say, if Joe had knew you was here, he'd 'a' gone to Europe."

EMANCIPATION

BY WALTER H. GARDNER

IN THE chill and sodden trenches where the Channel rain-storm drenches
Sits the clerk who sold you ties and shirts and socks,
All a-shiver where he huddles in the mud between the puddles;
Getting used to cold and hunger and hard knocks.

Sweating through unwonted duties; growling as he chases cooties—
He's a man—who sold you socks and ties and shirts.
Sixty pounds of pack and rifle he can swing as if a trifle;
Grimly grinning as the shrapnel 'round him spurts.

Tanned of skin and stout of muscle, he has learned to fight and hustle—
He lives to get a Boche before he dies!
Gone his adolescent callow—gone his pasty skin and sallow—
Do you think that he'll go back to shirts and ties?

When "*Der Tag*" comes that he marches through festooned victorious arches,
Will he then go back to ties and socks and shirts?
Punch the clock in urban cages? Fawn and scrape for paltry wages?
He who learned to laugh at danger, scars and hurts?

No! Before they've finished cheering he'll have started pioneering—
Living hard and clean out under open skies.
Delving in Alaskan beaches—tilling Manitoba's reaches—
Forever done with socks and shirts and ties.

Probing the Sierras' aeries—driving tractors on the prairies—
Sunburned, sturdy, stout and hardy as an ox.
Freedom for the world achieving—freedom for himself receiving;
He who once sold shirts and ties and socks!

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Jackson Tactics

An Up-and-down-the-Earth Tale

A Complete Novelette

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Oakes Respects an Adversary," "America Horns In," etc.

SOMEBODY should write a great book about breakfast. Not that it has not been attempted, but the opportunities have not been as much as skimmed. Consider Cæsar and a hard-boiled egg—why, empires have been lost and won about a breakfast table; and an ear of old corn, roasted in camp-fire coals, to be washed down presently with unclean water, has outweighed—by the inspiration that it brought—many a Lucullan spread.

Supper is good, remarkably good, beneath the singing stars of a frosty high-veld night; but there is something about food at dawn that puts it in another category and goes right to the heart of any true adventurer.

I am thinking now particularly of the breakfast Lord Montdidier, Fred Oakes, Bill Yerkes, Cadji the Portuguese, and I ate in the dead murderer Charles du Maurier's nest in the Libomba Hills. The recent sight of the scoundrel with both hands lashed behind him, leaping and stumbling down a cliff-side until he missed his footing and was brained against the rocks, might be expected to have spoiled our appetite. Not so, however.

The rascal's black wives, and snuff-and-butter-colored young ones, stood on a rock parapet sixty or seventy yards away from us wailing for their dead tyrant, afraid to go down and care for the mangled corpse, but too ridden by memory of his tyranny to turn away. Their ululating howls sent the kites off in startled flight, and stirred the camp curs to emulation. But we ate on—all except Cadji. The Portuguese don't care for early breakfast, or so he said.

A hundred yards away from the women, in a corner behind a shed tucked under the rim of the nearly circular hollow-on-a-hill, that formed the dead robber's lair, some of his Kaffirs sat pounding skin-and-gourd drums, in broken cadences that rose to thunder and died again to a palpitating murmur. Obviously even to the tyro like myself that din was by way of neither mourning nor exultation. It was penetrating—business-like. It had a purpose. Compelling of attention though it was, however, it did not interfere with the

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thumping noise of women bruising their breasts in token of new widowhood.

"Somebody 'ud better stop that tom-toming," said Yerkes between mouthfuls. "That's their way of sending news."

"Oh, it is nothing—nothing," said Cadji, stroking his imperial and looking at us each in turn.

Montdidier glanced up at once and eyed him searchingly for about a second, but Senhor Cadji was not aware of that.

WE WERE eating at the dead du Maurier's table inside the mean, frame house almost in the exact center of the hollow, its roof about on a level with the camp's circumference—so that by standing on the roof a man could command the whole horizon. Our own clean, white linen had been spread on the unwashed boards, and our own boys served the meal; but the food was taken chiefly from the robber's stores, and it was good food.

Montdidier sat on my right, with a rifle leaning against his knees but with an air, nevertheless, of being in no hurry. Fred Oakes faced him, eating enormously, with the appetite that swift recovery from fever brings, uproarious between platefuls. He had taken a keen dislike to Cadji, and Fred's emotions are not surreptitious; in order to avoid him, the Portuguese sat so close to Yerkes as to make eating for the latter difficult. All the same, Yerkes contrived to demolish ears of corn after the series fashion, in which Americans can do so many wonderful things.

"Great stuff, corn!" he announced with his mouth full. "Only thing that reconciles me to East Africa. I was weaned on it! A man can march, fight, and be merry on corn!"

"We English get along better with wheat," said Montdidier; and I noticed Oakes getting ready a time-worn jest about Americans and corn and hogs and kaffirs.

But the Portuguese interrupted.

"My God, you gentlemen! Oh, my God! You sit here, you joke, you eat, and you discuss! You—what is the expression—you pass the time of day! And the time passes with nothing whatever done to guard against the terrible danger we are all in!"

"Eat, you fool!" Oakes advised him, pushing over a dish of corn. "Fill your belly, and crowd fear out!"

"Pah!" Cadji answered disgustedly. "Who could eat at such a time? Who but a person unaware—one uncomprehending, could as much as swallow? You do not understand! You do not appreciate! You have killed this Charles du Maurier——"

"Pardon me, *senhor*," Montdidier interrupted, laying down his knife and fork.

We all stopped eating, for it was obvious Monty was going to lead from a strong hand.

"You are the official member of this party, representing your Government. Naturally I put the prisoner in your safe-keeping. You let him escape. So, technically as well as morally, you are answerable for his death. If you had kept him covered with your rifle, he would never have attempted a feat impossible with tied hands. If you had guarded him properly, tried him legally, and hanged him as in duty bound, your Government would have been responsible. As it is, you must accept the blame yourself."

"Oh, my God, *senhor!*" the Portuguese stuttered, his face taking on a shade of blue beneath the yellow. "You don't know what you say! To accuse me of that man's death is to place me at feud with all his fierce relations! I would rather face my Government any day!"

Yerkes burst into a yell of laughter, and Oakes spluttered with a mouth full, but Monty sat unmoved—perhaps a trace more suave—certainly not outwardly amused.

"I understand," he said, finishing his coffee. "I sympathize, and all that kind of thing. But you see, your—ah—Government—at its own price—placed you at our disposal until the completion of—ah—certain duties."

"*Senhor*," said the Portuguese, "Charles du Maurier being dead, my concern is no longer in these hills. From up above here I can see your claims below this hill. You have staked them properly. I will sign the necessary paper and depart. There is no need for me to pace the boundaries. I go home!"

"Sorry to disagree with you," said Monty. "You've a tenth share, legally assigned to you, in consideration of services yet to be rendered."

"I will sell you back your share," said

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Cadji, and Oakes and Yerkes set up such a roar of laughter that Monty had to laugh too.

Derision at their own expense is something the Latin races are unable to suffer calmly, and Cadji's mustaches bristled, and his jaundiced eyes expanded until Monty frowned to the others to go slow. It was at Oakes the Portuguese glared most savagely, because Oakes had baited him mercilessly all through breakfast. But it was Yerkes who sprang the next surprize.

"You did not suspect me of knowing Portuguese, did you, Cadji? I learned it in Brazil. I understood when you told the dead man's boys to thump the news out on their drums!"

"You yellow hellion!" said Oakes, smiling pleasantly; and I felt as if a bomb had been exploded.

Monty, however, was calm enough.

"We can imagine," said Monty, "that those claims would not be worth much—to us—if the du Maurier family should come and catch us napping."

"We understand, my saffron sweetmeat," added Oakes, "that your Government would rather see the du Maurier family alive, and us dead, if it has to lose one or the other——"

"As happens to be the case," said Yerkes.

"Shut up, America, and let me talk!" Oakes rapped the table with impatient knuckles. "We know that the du Maurier gang can cover up official crimes, and produce more tribute money than any honestly owned and worked gold-claims. Any fool knows your game now is to leave us to the mercy of the du Maurier gang, and make new terms with them after they've scuppered us! Well—you yellow hellion—your game won't work!"

WITH a prodigious effort the Portuguese official calmed himself and rose from his chair. He had short legs, with the peculiar result that he stood scarcely any taller than he sat. His khaki suit, brownish eyes, and yellow skin were different shades of one hue; even the gold watch-chain dangling in a loop across his breast was part of one objectionable harmony, unrelieved except by dead-black hair, black mustache and little black imperial. From a short distance the wrinkles and freckles on his forehead gave the impression of eyebrows raised in disapproval, but in fact he had scarcely any eyebrows at all. A more disagreeable human it would be hard to imagine, and if it had not been that we four were normally good-tempered men at breakfast I think the explosion would have come sooner.

"You speak of my game!" he said with that savagely restrained utterance which goes with racial loathing. "As if I were a tom-fool, or a child! Game! That is all you English think of! Game! I will tell you how your game stands! This dead man du Maurier's sixteen male relations will come with a host of armed natives to avenge him! You have your four selves, and your unarmed servants! Me you have not got, for I go my way. You dare not restrain me! You dare not prevent my going, for I am of the Government!"

Then Monty did a thing that made us all stare. I would not have questioned him, for they had only that dawn raised me from salaried employment to a partnership in their venture, and I was not yet used to the sensation. Yerkes, too, although a partner from the first, was diffident as yet, and cautious in disagreement. From Oakes, however, I looked for stormy protest. Yet for the moment Oakes kept still.

"I see you have the best of the argument, Senhor Cadji," said Monty. "Of course, we couldn't think of imposing restraint on a Government official."

"*Senhor*," said Cadji, "I should think not indeed!"

Oakes gasped. But Monty looked at Oakes lazily across the table, without as much as a wink or a smile or quivering eyelid, and that time the explosion died still-born.

"But, of course," Monty went on, looking at Cadji with a frank expression that would have disarmed the suspicion of a panther, "you being a Portuguese officer, and therefore presumably a gentleman——"

Senhor Cadji bowed impressively, not pacified indeed, but mollified.

"You wouldn't accept a share in this enterprise without returning value for it in some shape or another."

"There is nothing I can do for you! Nothing!" said the Portuguese, stiffening again at once. "Your position here is——"

"Pardon me," said Monty. "There is something you can do."

"I will listen," said Cadji stiffly. "But I warn you in advance that you delude yourself!"

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"Very good of you, I'm sure," said Monty. "My idea is this: we four can hold this place for some time against half-breeds of the du Maurier stamp. They wouldn't dare come at night. By day we can hold off all comers."

"A flattering thought!" smirked Cadji.

"Since you're so anxious to go," continued Monty, "and Chai Chai is on your way to Lourenço Marques, we should appreciate your calling on the commandant at Chai Chai and telling him of our predicament. You might ask him to send troops to our assistance."

The frown left Cadji's face, and he nodded; more to himself than to us.

"I could do that for you," he said. "Perhaps the commandant would send some soldiers."

"In that case," said Monty, "we would consider your tenth share in our gold-claims paid for."

"Bosh!" exploded Oakes at last. "Why beg favors of him? I say, hold him here! Send a letter by runner to Chai Chai. The commandant wouldn't help us, but he'd have to rescue his Government's official! Kick him into a storehouse and turn the key on him!"

"Second the motion!" said Yerkes, leaning back until his chair swayed dangerously on two legs.

But Monty did not put the motion to a vote.

"You see, you fellows," he said, "our position is not dangerous. The du Maurier gang would never dare attack by night."

Oakes gasped.

"Why the devil not?" he demanded.

"Just when I should imagine they would come," said I.

"They're superstitious," said Monty, "and their native followers still more so. No—by night we're safe. By day we can defend ourselves. Let's let the *senhor* go."

"Monty," said Oakes, "I've seen you drunk on occasion, but I've never known you as bad as this. There's a deep well outside with a bucket and winch. Stick your head in cold water! Get your brain cool!"

But Monty merely smiled.

"Of course," said Yerkes judicially, "Montdidier's a member of the British House of Lords, and they're famous for wisdom! He's a cavalry officer, and the British army's simply notorious for strategy! I was never even in our militia, and don't claim it would have helped much if I had been. But I'm a judge of a blackguard when I see one, and I'd sooner trust a Mexican than this man Cadji. I'll make one to toss him over the cliff after Charles du Maurier, and take the consequences."

"Bravo, America!" roared Oakes, bringing his fist down on the table with a crash. "Monty, it's proposed and seconded that we take this Cadji by his four legs and toss him off the cliff! Put it to a vote!"

"Vetoed from the chair," said Monty, showing his strong teeth in a very friendly smile. One could never believe when Monty smiled that anything could go wrong in the universe. "Shall I ask for a vote of confidence?"

"No, you —— fool!" Oakes answered. "What's your veto for?"

"If it's a question of confidence," said Yerkes, "I'll be a —— fool too rather than stand out."

Monty looked my way.

"Lead on!" I said. "I'd rather get scoughed among friends than save my bacon and lose them."

"Very well," said Monty. "Our claims are the point. One way and another we've a large investment down there on the plain. These du Mauriers are an interlude."

"Interlude?" said Cadji, showing his yellow teeth. "*Senhors*, if they are an interlude, preserve me from a main theme."

"They shall not spoil our sleep," said Monty. "I shall turn in and snore when time to sleep comes. By day I admit there is need of alertness; but if you'll ask that Chai Chai commandant to hurry, that should solve the problem. You may go, Senhor Cadji, if it suits you."

"In other words," said Oakes, "get to —— out of here, and look sharp about it."

CADJI turned and faced Oakes, with an expression on his face of loathing, hate, and rage commingled. A Portuguese scoundrel detests the English with the same whole-hearted intensity with which a Portuguese gentleman admires them, and has an almost unique capacity for stirring reciprocal feelings.

"As for you," he hissed between set teeth, "it is well for you a nobleman is of your party. Yourself I would have shot as I would native. You are excr-r-r-uciating! This nobleman, however, obliterates you

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by his presence. I rejoice to know that when I turn my back I shall have seen your face for the last time.

"These others are Englishmen," he went on, turning to Yerkes. "Everybody knows that to be English means to have no sense of proportion—no judgment of circumstances. Hypocrisy renders the English blind. The world is peppered over with the bones of Englishmen who did not know enough to run away. But you are American, and should have better sense. You should persuade them to run away at once, sir."

Yerkes had been rude to him too, so it was not likely he was moved by friendliness. He probably thought he detected a weak joint in our armor through which he could inject discouragement.

"Why don't you go with him, America?" jeered Oakes.

"Americans run after the English!" Yerkes answered, and we all laughed, except Cadji.

He sighed with a contemptuous shake of the head.

"I pity you, *senhors*," he said. "God knows I pity your foolish mirth! You have the gold mania, that makes men deaf, blind, mad. I go to Chai Chai. I shall advise the commandant. In a week his troops may be here—possibly, if all goes well, in time to find such splinters of your bones as the jackals no longer care to lick. I shall spend a little money on masses for your souls. Enough! I go!"

He looked for his rifle, but could not see it anywhere. Monty proceeded to enlighten him.

"We shall keep that, *senhor*. If these du Mauriers are all you say, we'll need spare rifles. Traveling by day, and camping in native kraals, you'll be safe enough. You'll have the satisfaction of knowing too that your rifle is in the hands at last of a man who can shoot straight. Oakes shall have it for his second string."

"This is audacity!" said Cadji, rising to another peak of fury. "Does the English House of Lords condescend to larceny? You are a thief, my lord!"

"You've leave to go!" said Monty, his drawl gone, and his words more like a whiplash.

"Give me my rifle. Then I will too gladly go."

"Fred, if he isn't gone in exactly one minute, will you do the needful?" asked Monty.

Oakes jumped up, and the Portuguese backed away, snarling.

"Who can be sorry for the end of such people?" he sneered. "Who can truly pity you? I shall have masses said for your tormented soul, but—" with a huge shrug of the shoulders—"who can truly pity you?"

We heard him call his own eight porters, and Oakes and I went and watched him down the winding cart-road to the foot of the hill, lest he should try to corrupt our boys before leaving us.

"His sort believe in corruption first and in any event," said Monty, over his shoulder after us. "Better watch him out of sight!"

We watched until he became a little speck amid the hot blue haze on the plain, and vanished finally among the far-spaced thorn-trees, Oakes saying nothing, and I having nothing to say. It was Yerkes who came up behind us and broke the silent spell at last.

"You spoke just now of our House of Lords getting drunk on occasion," he began.

"Almost, you might say he never does," Oakes answered, "except now and then by way of punctuating history."

"Does he suffer from the sun?"

"Not he. Head's like a thatched roof. Even in India the sun couldn't do a thing to him."

"Have fits?"

"No."

"Erratic spells?"

"No," said Oakes, "he's like a compass needle. You can deflect him for a time by side issues, but he always returns to the point."

"Obsessions, then?"

"Only one, and I share it. He's after money enough to open his family seat in the Midlands and live there according to Hoyle. What's your worry?"

"He has asked me to tell you to search this camp for the dead man's favorite servant, and send him with a message to the whole bloodthirsty gang!"

"Um-m-m," said Oakes. "Did he tell you the message? The wording of it?"

"Yes. He's crazy! After eating crow to the extent of asking that Dago to carry our appeal for help to the commandant, what do you suppose? This messenger is

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to warn the du Mauriers of Cadji's movements!"

Oakes whistled.

"Where is Monty now?" he asked.

"Playing chess with himself on the back veranda."

"A good sign," said Oakes. "When he does that it means he sees the end, and is working out the middle part."

But that did not suit Yerkes.

"That's his message," he said. "I've delivered it. I'm for an open forum myself, signs or no signs. Just now you yourself were up in the air and arguing with him."

But Oakes scarcely heard.

"Didn't he give you others anything to do?" he asked.

"Yes, but——"

"What?"

"Search for valuable stores—especially ammunition—everything except livestock—and bring it all to the house."

"Well? Why not do it?" snapped Oakes.

"Because—now get this, will you, and tell me whether he's crazy—after we've got everything into the house—especially ammunition, mind—we're to send another boy to the du Mauriers to tell them what we've done!"

"And he's playing chess by himself?" asked Oakes.

"Precisely."

"Good enough! The signs are right!"

"To —— with signs!" Yerkes answered. "I've a right to know what orders mean. So has this man. You bet blindly if you like!"

"Very well," said Oakes. "I always trust him when he plays chess. You two go and heckle him. See what you get!"

And he walked off with a rifle over his shoulder and a native boy behind him, reminding me, for no reason that I could tell, of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Man Friday*. A moment later I heard him questioning Charles du Maurier's natives in a mixture of Cape Dutch, pidgin English, Zulu, Chironga, and Portuguese, with a good-humored skill that would have wrung admiration from the builders of the Tower of Babel.

"Come on," said Yerkes to me. "Let's have this out. Monty's a good man, but I'm going back to know what his game is."

I went, wishing all the way I could think of good ground for refusing. The glamour of Monty's peculiar charm was over me, and his permission, only given that dawn, to address him as Monty, had rather gone to my head. It would have suited me just then to accept orders whatever the consequences; but I understood Yerkes had been first to propose that I be taken into partnership—an argument too subtle to resist.

WE FOUND Monty with his long legs stretched out and a little chess-board on his lap, so absorbed that he did not look up at our approach.

"Like that picture of King Whatsisname playing with a basketful of puppies," Yerkes whispered. "Remember it? *Le roi s'amuse.*"

Monty heard either footfall or whispering, looked up, and eyed each of us swiftly in turn.

"Quite interesting," he said. "Black to move next, and mate in two."

"I told Oakes what you said he is to do," Yerkes began; but Monty was studying the board again.

His bare throat and arms, polo shoulders, and general air of being more at home on horseback than afoot, made the intense interest in a chess-board seem incongruous. The combination should not have suggested effeminacy, or laziness, but to us at that moment I suppose it did.

"Did you?" he said with both eyes on his game. "That's scarcely strange, seeing I asked you to."

"Thought you might like to tell us two something of your plan," Yerkes suggested.

"Hadn't thought of it," he said, still busy with the chess-board.

"We have," said Yerkes.

"Thought what?" asked Monty, still not looking up.

"We ought to be told. We've a right to know."

Bill Yerkes shut his mouth up tight, uncomfortable but resolute. Monty looked up again. The chess-board was one of those folding things with a patent catch, that will hold the pieces in position when a trigger is pressed. He closed up the board, set it on the floor between his feet, and met our eyes.

"Have you a plan of your own to meet the situation?" he asked. I did not detect a trace of rancor or resentment.

"No," said Yerkes. "We want to know yours."

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"What for?" he asked. "To criticize it?"

"No," said Yerkes.

"What for then?"

"As a matter of principle."

Yerkes leaned his back against a veranda post in an attitude that said better than words—

"Here's where you and I have this out."

"As a matter of principle," said Monty, "I refuse."

"House of Lords stuff," Yerkes answered. He smiled, but his eyes were hard. "It doesn't get by me. I like you right well. You're a good leader, but——"

"But what?" demanded Monty.

"We're not hired men."

Monty got up, and offered Yerkes the chair.

"Would you rather lead?" he asked.

"Certainly not!" Yerkes answered.

"I'll resign at once in your favor if you can get the other two to support you," Monty assured him.

"I wouldn't think of suggesting it," said Yerkes, beginning to get rather red behind the ears. "What I'm after is explanation."

"And if you'll take my place as leader, then I'll give it," answered Monty.

"I've not questioned your leadership," said Yerkes.

"You've perfect right to at any time," Monty told him calmly. "But as long as you concede me the right to give them, you must obey orders! I'm leader by election. If the other two will vote for you instead of me, I'll make the vote unanimous."

"Aren't you rather a stickler for your pound of flesh?" Yerkes asked; and Monty, who very rarely laughed aloud, surprized us both by squealing with amusement.

"Speaking of flesh," he said, "if you delay until the sun grows much hotter, my dear chap, you'll lose weight! I imagine there's a lot of stuff that'll need shepherding across the compound. If you don't watch every stick of it the natives 'll steal it all."

"Then I'm to consider myself snubbed?" said Yerkes, grinning with compounded manliness and discontent.

"My dear chap," said Monty with his friendliest smile, "when I feel called on to snub a man he's never in doubt of it. I've refused your request, that's all. Now is it quite clear what I want you both to do?"

"I begin to savvy how kings and lords and similar folk have stayed in the saddle so long!" said Yerkes, walking away beside me.

We stopped a short way off and looked back. There sat Monty, oblivious again of his surroundings, with the chess-board on his knees, and a look on his face that could not by the wildest stretch of imagination be supposed to express resentment, or even victory. The incident had passed utterly out of mind.

"Look at him, will you!" Yerkes murmured, with a sort of grudging, genuine admiration. "That's not put on for effect. That's natural. He'll die in his boots with the same unaffected air of having his own way. You couldn't convert him; he's been educated for a thousand years. You couldn't bribe him. I'd hate the job of trying to teach him. Are the House of Lords all like him?"

"Not by a mile!" said I.

"If they were," said Yerkes with a dry laugh, "autocracy would live forever. Too efficient to dispense with! I'd never have believed I'd let a lord put it all over me. The fact that he is one made me more determined to have it out with him. Gosh! Who'd have thought it? I come away licked, and liking him better! All the same it looks like crazy stuff to me, telling the du Mauriers first of Cadji's movements, and then of what we're doing with the stores. What d'you make of it?"

"Nothing," said I. "Neither head, nor tail, nor middle part—nothing!"

"And how about that boast that the du Maurier gang daren't attack at night? Put yourself in their place. If you had the advantage of numbers and knowledge of the ground, and meant to attack at all, wouldn't you prefer night?"

"Seems so to me," said I.

"I'll tell you one sure thing," said Yerkes. "Monty 'll get less sleep tonight than he supposes! Boss he may be—captain—general—nabob—lord high chancellor, or whatever he cares to call himself. Tonight he stays awake! He keeps a bright lookout, or I wasn't born across the water. But what's that awful noise?"

"Oakes," said I.

"In pain?"

"No," I said. "He's usually silent when it hurts him. He's feeling jolly. He's playing and singing songs."

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WE ROUNDED the corner of the longest store-shed, and came face to face with Fred seated on an empty barrel. He must have found Charles du Maurier's favorite servant and dispatched him on the errand, for he had started on our part of the morning's work and had it already under way. I knew him already well enough to be quite sure he would not turn aside or pause until his own job was disposed of.

The three doors of the shed were open wide, and he had set every native he could find to dragging out the sacks of corn and stacking them in readiness to carry across the compound. To encourage them he was making what he calls music, with the aid of the strident, all-too-portable contraption that he has toted with him up and down the length of suffering continents—singing a song in English, that I suppose the black-face minstrels charmed him with when he was a boy in knickerbockers on the sands at Deal.

"Folks say I should be happy,
Oh, the happiest of men;
I am the happy father of
A family of ten.
And they all take after me!
They all take after me!
My peculiaritee seems to run in the familee!
They all take whisky in their tea;
They'd all of 'em rather die than work,
And they all take after me"

"Well, my mutineers?" he grinned, ceasing from his song for lack of breath. "Have you brought the skipper to his senses? In the light of your righteous zeal for explanations does he see light? Or is his belly like a rock, with information frozen in its midst? Was he wax or adamant?"

He struck a wild chord on his infernal instrument and, having some breath to spare again, and natives ayearn for noise to give them courage, proceeded to improvise:

"Puff! Puff! Two men in a huff!
Went to the skipper to grouse at the duff!
Said it was smelly and bad for your belly.
Asked him for plenty of apricot jelly
Instead of that —— indigestible stuff!
The grub wasn't wholesome or tasty enough,
And they told him so pat! But the skipper was gruff!
Gruff, and ungracious, and ugly, and rough!

——! ——! Quicker than ——!
They cut their cackle and ran pell mell!
Their knees were aquiver, their skins all ashiver,
They'd nothing to answer, no nothinsomediver!
The skipper's foot rose, and the skipper's fist fell,
And his language—his language—his language was —well,
It was such as no ladylike singer could tell!
And his wrath neither rum nor tobacco could quell!"

He paused, and was ready with a third verse, but Yerkes picked up a pumpkin that had rolled through the storehouse door, and hove it at him with venomous accuracy. Fred, barrel and concertina went over together in catastrophe, and Yerkes put on the finishing touch with a bucket of water some thoughtful native had left in the shade against thirst-time. They fought, squealed, and rolled each other over like a pair of bear cubs for fifteen minutes after that, reducing natives and every one to such boisterous good humor that the prospect of heavy work in the hot sun ceased to discourage. So we soon had the corn sacks hurrying in swift procession to the house.

Monty bade us stack them in such manner as to block all the windows except for a peep-hole here and there. The precaution seemed sensible enough, and increased our contentment to the point of no longer worrying about obscure reasons for the rest of his plan. There surely were obscurities.

For instance, we put no store of water in the house; yet nobody troubled himself. We stacked no fuel where it could have been reached without exposure to rifle-fire from the parapet; and nobody worried about that either just at that time.

It was I, nosing among the sheds, who knocked the padlock off an inner compartment and discovered our blasting-powder that Charles du Maurier had stolen out of our cabin on the claims below. I forget how many hundred-weights there were. There was all our fuse as well, and some of the usual prospecting tools, such as picks, crowbars, axes, shovels. Monty took charge of the lot.

Yerkes found du Maurier's ammunition in a chest in another shed. Monty told me to pack it in small parcels ready for mule-back. Whatever was of great value to us, and easy to carry, he seemed to be making ready for a swift exodus. On the other hand, however valuable a thing might be intrinsically, if it was hard to move he had it stowed inside the four walls of du Maurier's house—apparently where the enemy could find it easiest. There was no understanding him.

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He instructed the second messenger himself and sent him over the hills to find the du Maurier gang. Yerkes picked out two likely boys, Oakes one, and I two for the purpose, but Monty turned them all down, and, with that uncanny gift of his for understanding natives, chose a limping, skin-and-bone, all-but-naked Ronga savage whom we had overlooked.

First he showed the boy in detail how we had made the house easy to defend, and particularly how the corn and hides, and everything else a native values, had been brought in and stowed. Then he gave him a handful of small coins, and made him promise not to tell the du Mauriers what he had seen. Finally he told him to go and spy on the du Mauriers and bring back word, under penalty of a frightful thrashing if he failed.

"That's where you've missed your guess," said Yerkes. "That's how the Zulu nation spread. Their kings threatened them with death and torture if they failed, so they simply didn't come back. I dare bet you that boy won't return."

"That'll be too bad, then," said Monty, and walked away.

"Stuffy!" said Yerkes. "By ——, he's stuffy! What's the matter with him?"

AFTER the lame messenger had gone we lined up all the remaining natives in a double row in front of the house, women and brats and all. There and then Monty offered them the unexpected alternative of running away at once wherever they choose, or of obeying all further orders under penalty of death for disobedience.

After some giggling and hesitation, five of the women with their brats, and eleven men elected to go. Monty gave them enough corn for about a week's rations, and chased them away, refusing them time to do more than snatch their few belongings. Yerkes and I watched them depart down the wagon-road and start toward a distant kraal, whose roofs and smoke were just visible like a blot in the heat-haze on the plain.

When we came back it was to find Monty surveying the remaining five of du Maurier's dusky widows, with more than an average of a child apiece, about twenty women belonging to du Maurier's men, and thirty-two of the men themselves.

Especially the women, they stood looking like people who had sold themselves, and to my inexperienced eye they were an awkward problem. But Monty was undisturbed. He summoned "Sixpence," our hideous, wide-nostriled Shangan cook, to interpret, and made a speech to them—a masterpiece of directness, delivered in short, crisp sentences with a pause after each for Sixpence to get his work in. With the African native's incorrigible genius for mimicry, the Shangan multiplied the directness, caricatured Monty, interpreted voice-inflection into gesticulation and turned the stern business into drama.

Nothing makes much impression on the native mind unless the epic, the poetic, the romantic in his nature is appealed to. Natives themselves understand that, and Monty had the knack of choosing natives for his purpose whose special gift was mental quickness.

"Presently there will be fighting," said Monty.

The Shangan, sweeping the huddled assemblage with a fiery eye, flung one bronze arm skyward, shook it as if he held a flaming spear, stamped on the ground with a right foot from which three toes were missing, and gave utterance to clicks and gutturals that no written form can compass. Monty, himself inspired by the Shangan's mirroring of his own mood, smiled and continued.

"The very bad man Charles du Maurier, who lived on this hill-top and called himself king of the Libombas, is dead. Ye have seen him lie dead. The vultures eat him!"

Snapping fingers, stamping feet, flashing white teeth and an amazing flow of clicks ensued, as Sixpence did that into the Ronga tongue. His pantomime of a vulture descending on a carcass was so realistic that it made the women wail. But the wailing ceased for Monty to speak again.

"All that was Charles du Maurier's is ours now!"

Monty included his party with a gesture; and Sixpence magnified the gesture to mean that we now owned all the earth as far as the horizon, and perhaps beyond.

"But the bad man was born of evil parents, who had other children who are all bad. All the du Mauriers are bad," said Monty.

The face of Sixpence, as he shocked his audience with an announcement of what

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they all already knew, would have made the angels smile. Accustomed since birth to nothing but outrage and tyranny, they clucked, and clicked, and grunted with pained surprize that such things could be. There is no great fundamental difference between the savage listening to oratory and the white man at a melodrama.

"The du Mauriers will dispute our ownership. They will come soon. There will be fighting."

Mark Antony could doubtless weave spells with his silver tongue; but he never surpassed Sixpence, for Sixpence reached the limit of the humanly attainable, in a language whose chief purpose is to stir emotion. Judging by his frenzy the whole world would presently be at throat-grips.

"But we are much more terrible than they!" said Monty. "So we shall win."

Sixpence interpreted that sentence, stamping as the buffalo treads mud, in token of the utter annihilation of our enemies, his great wide nostrils snorting and his eyes afire with righteous fury. The audience was very visibly impressed.

"It is the custom of conquerors," said Monty, "to do with the goods of the conquered what they will."

Sixpence's outflung arms and rolling eyes expressed the illimitable opportunity thus given us of doing unimaginable things.

"So when the fighting is over," continued Monty, "all the oxen, and all the corn, all the cows; the goats, and pigs, and hens; all the hides and goatskins; all the cut timber, and wire, and beads—" the interpreter's eyes by that time were popping from his head—"the great and little cooking-pots, the old and new blankets, and all else worth taking shall be divided equally among our servants and yourselves—a dower for every woman—a fortune for every man!"

Sixpence paused before he told them that. Then he broke the news in awe-struck tones. Having reached already the ultimate that oratory could attain, he now had to let the amazing fact do its own work.

The response was not quite what might have been expected. Blank incredulity was obvious. One or two of the men and women murmured. They all looked sidewise at one another, some grinning and some afraid to grin, and one man shouted a reply.

"He says," explained Sixpence, "dat —— fool niggah saying, 'You give—come Portuguese an' take away —— quick!' "

"Tell them," said Monty, "that I have a letter here from the Portuguese lieutenant-governor, granting to me whatever I find in this robber's lair, in return for my services in ridding the country of him. Tell them that."

Sixpence explained, but it was sight of the sheet of paper produced from Monty's wallet and waved before their eyes, that turned the trick. The more ignorant and raw the savage, the more deeply is he impressed by sight of the written word. Give a native a gun, and he may be afraid to leave his own village; but give him a letter and he will dare travel from end to end of Africa. The written word spells authority. A gun means trouble and stirs resentment.

Faces brightened. The spokesman spoke again.

"Dat niggah saying," explained Sixpence: " 'You giving dem each man letter same time as cows, goats, skins, cooking-pots an' all dem t'ings—dat good. All right. You not giving letter, coming Portuguese and take away!' "

"All right," said Monty; "each man shall have a letter."

Followed a deal of grinning, and speaking behind hands. The spokesman spoke again. Sixpence interpreted.

"Dem niggahs saying, 'Why not you give now?' "

Monty snatched at that opportunity as he would have swooped down on a polo-ball, unerring, swift, and full of a vast good humor.

"Tell them," he said, "there's something to do before I give them letters."

Sixpence, agog with new sense of climax, made the great dish-like hollow ring with that announcement, and the sheepish grins faded.

"And death," added Monty, "for the fool who fails!"

Sixpence interpreted in a voice of tragedy.

"Until dark they are all to stay here and be noisy; to sing, to dance. But no strong drink! There is kaffir beer in a storehouse, but none shall drink it until the fighting shall be over. Let there be tom-toming—thunder of drums, the more the merrier! At dusk I shall give another order. Him who makes not enough noise on the tom-tom all afternoon I shall merely punish

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with a half-ration for supper. But he who disobeys the order I shall give at dusk shall be thrown to the vultures, and his share of the loot shall be divided among the rest."

IT WAS high noon by the time that speech was finished. The sun beat down on the hilltop, but a wind blew steadily from the west and made life bearable—as it almost never is at midday on the low veld. Having been steadily on the go since dawn, my own inclination was for a solid meal and a long rest in the shade, but, I suppose because I was youngest as well as junior partner, Monty gave me the least assuming work to do.

"I'll send dinner to you," he said. "Just see that they keep together and make lots of noise. There'll be spies sent to look us over. Don't let them doubt we're all here and jubilant."

"Let loose the kaffir beer, then," said I. "Give each of them a quart or two of that, and there'll be any amount of noise."

"Yes," he said, "tonight too, just when I shall want silence. Please do as I say."

My training aboard ship, where work was done in watches Bristol fashion, had left its mark on me and I told off four men to every tom-tom I could find. Then I made a dial of a stick set upright, placing stones to represent the half-hours as nearly as I could guess them. I had to call Sixpence to explain the system of half-hour spells, and it needed patience as well as determination to explain it to him first.

But the game got going at last; and I devised a plan of giving each one a slip of paper as his turn was finished. They, not knowing any more than I what was intended by the slip of paper, stayed close at hand with the paper in their fists to find out. I counted them often, to make assurance doubly sure, but their curiosity had the effect of fetters, and I needed not have troubled.

From time to time Yerkes and Oakes came over to chat with me, but they knew little more than I what was going on in Monty's mind.

"The whole thing's a riddle," I grumbled. "We send Cadji with a request for troops. We send a native at once to warn the enemy of Cadji's movements! We make the house safe against attack, but pay no attention whatever to the outer defenses!"

"Mighty mysterious!" said Yerkes. "You've left out the points that worry me most. Notice; we send Cadji to ask for troops, but carefully insult and enrage him at the last minute! We take his rifle away, to make quite absolutely sure he'll hate us to the limit, after telling him as much of our plans as any of us knows! We send a native to spy on the du Mauriers, after first showing him all our arrangements! We get ready to defend the house after a sort of fashion, but get the mules' saddles and bridles ready for swift departure! Oakes and I have been busy packing the loads for the past two hours. We could saddle the mules in the dark now and be off in a minute. But where to? Why?"

"What has Monty been doing?" I asked. "Playing chess?"

"——, no!" said Oakes. "He packed the box away hours ago. Riddle? Craziness? You two poor simple gallery gods!"

"My life's at stake, and so is yours," said Yerkes. "We've a right to criticize."

"Gallery god," said Oakes. "I flattered you! Can't you understand? Life's no use to Monty unless he can make a play of it. The bally man never grew up. He's younger today than yesterday. That's why the fever can't make headway with him. It knocks me down flat every once in so often; it has made Yerkes yellow as a lemon; it'll get you yet, my twenty-one-year-old. But Monty throws it off as a Mexican sheds virtue—it can't find a soft spot to get its claws in! Do you see what he has done now?"

We all went 'round the corner of the shed and looked at the house. On its roof was the platform from which Charles du Maurier had watched all trails on the plain below, on guard against approaching danger. It was a little, round platform, perched on a short, stout pole, and reached by a ladder from the room below. Fixed on the platform now was something I did not recognize at first.

"Our flare!" laughed Oakes.

I remembered then that among our stores, in the shed we had erected on our gold-claims at the foot of the hill, had been a kerosene flare, powerful enough to permit night-time digging on a considerable scale in case the weather or any other contingency should have made that expedient. When Charles du Maurier burst the shed open in our absence and stole everything inside, he had doubtless included that among the loot.

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"That," said I, "looks like the limit to me!"

"Limit of what?" said Yerkes.

"Of dramatic skill, Hiram," said Oakes, and Yerkes gave him a playful shove like a grizzly's, that sent him over backward among the tom-tom players. "Hiram," by a sort of tacit understanding between him and Oakes, stood for all that is unsophisticated in the States, and was invariably a signal for horse-play.

"The limit of inconsistency," said I. "If he lights that tonight, the house will be visible from every part of the ramparts. We shall simply look into a wall of black night! There'll be no moon—nothing!"

What I said was absolutely true. The house, standing as it did almost in the exact center of the depression, was commanded from every direction, once an adversary should gain the entrance or swarm over the natural rock parapet that formed the rim, or containing wall. It was true that the only entrance was fairly easy to defend, and that except for the winding wagon-road the sides of the hill were almost unscalable; but between almost and quite there is a great gulf fixed; and there was the equally true, and very disturbing circumstance that Monty had taken no steps whatever toward defending the ramparts. He seemed obsessed by the importance of the house itself, an importance in our eyes entirely dependent on other considerations.

While we looked at the ridiculous flare that he had lashed to the lookout platform, and, with the possible exception of Oakes—who jeered at Monty to his face and supported him in the teeth of reason behind his back—grew disheartened by the sight, I detected Monty himself crawling out from under the house, where we had stowed the blasting-powder. I called Yerkes' attention.

"Grave-digger stuff!" he sneered. "We'll have an 'Alas poor Yorick' dissertation at supper, I don't doubt! If our case weren't so pathetically serious it 'ud be funny. It's no use squealing, though. If we've cast our lot in with a crazy man, for the love of Mike let's die game!"

"America!" jeered Oakes. "I'll add ten Portuguese spondulix to Cadji's provision for masses for your soul if you'll die slowly in the limelight. I'll take down your last messages in shorthand. Watch—it'll be like this!"

He began to give an imitation of Bill Yerkes crossing the "great divide," but the act was interrupted by the arrival of an obvious spy from the du Mauriers—a bright-eyed young savage with an impudent, leery look, who carried a letter in a cleft stick, but acted as a man might who was taking photographs, turning this and that way to study everything in sight.

Oakes took the letter from him. Yerkes tripped him very neatly, and sat hard on him when he fell. I trussed his hands and feet to a wagon-wheel, and then we all three went to Monty with the letter.

There was no seal—only a thorn stuck through the folded sheet of paper to hold it together; and the writing, done in pencil that had been wetted at frequent intervals, was such a scrawl as would shame a seven-year-old child. Monty read it aloud, and then passed it 'round for us to look at.

It ran:

> To the inglishmun in Charles du Maurier's plac, you hav killed charles, you sonofaguns, and we will kill you onles you maik reckompens. We giv you until day after tomorrow morning early to get to —— out of this and leave five thousand pounds inglish money failing wich we come and let some blood. Put the money on charleys bed. Leave the mules in stabel. You will get no second warning. du maurier and company, by anatole du M.

"Do you believe a word of that guff?" Yerkes asked.

"Why not?" said Monty with his usual straight face. "Robbers are simple-minded folk."

He took out pencil and paper.

"You're going to answer them seriously?"

Even while he spoke the expression of Yerkes' face changed. I did not understand yet, but I saw that Yerkes divined at least something. If not contented, he was reassured.

Monty wrote in great, bold characters that the enemy would be better able to read than his usual rather illegible hand:

> Your offer under consideration. Will write again in good time. MONTDIDIER.

He folded the note, ran a thorn through it in the accepted fashion of the country, and gave it to me to give to the spy. So I went and loosed him, with Monty's repeating pistol handy in case of contingencies, and he ran as if all the deyils of the murder-fouled

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Libomba Hills were after him. The tom-toming, that had ceased while he lay bound because of the drummers' curiosity, burst out anew to thunder him farewell, adding wings to his flight; he went almost headlong down the wagon-road, making short-cuts with evident knowledge of the place, gaining speed so fast that long before he reached the plain he certainly could not have stopped himself.

"He's scared," said Yerkes, watching from beside me. "He'll tell them a weird story. He'll say we're preparing to fight like bobcats the day after tomorrow. Good enough!"

And now I began to see a glimmering of light, and suspect that after all Monty was not playing with us for his own amusement. He was amused, no doubt, but that was a by-product.

"Our House of Lords is a downier bird than I thought him," said Yerkes. "D'you get the theory? He tells Cadji he's confident the du Mauriers won't dare attack by night. He makes sure next that they'll capture Cadji; and he takes good care that Cadji hates us so thoroughly as to give us away completely at the first chance. Get that?

"Cadji gloats, and tells the du Mauriers we're easy. Cadji's probably glad to be captured. He makes a dicker with them. Most likely guarantees 'em an indemnity if they come and wipe us out. And he eggs 'em on to attack at night, when we're sure to be off guard!"

"Well and good!" said I.

"We're four to their seventeen—in the dark. What next?"

"Dunno what next," Yerkes admitted, "but I suspicion there's a deep trap laid! We make our play to deceive them into thinking we'll sleep in the house there, with no one on the watch. They send a letter to fool us into the belief that they won't attack until day after tomorrow morning at earliest. We write back kidding them we fall for it. I'll bet you a thousand dollars they come tonight, and that Monty's ready for them. What d'you say?"

"We're not what I'd call ready," I answered. "An enemy could swarm these cliffs at his leisure, jump the parapet, and be in on us without our striking a blow. Why, we haven't even blocked the main gate. They could ride up the wagon-road, and march right in. They couldn't do it in daylight, of course, even with one cool shot stationed at the top, but who's to stop them at night?"

"Search me," said Yerkes. "I don't think they could be stopped. I don't believe Monty wants 'em stopped. I'm beginning to think that it wouldn't be possible to hold this place against seventeen determined men—not at night at any rate—not whatever we did. Tell me, why, d'you suppose, did he take such care to let the du Mauriers know that everything in this camp that's worth plundering has been stowed in the house?"

"How d'ye mean?" I asked.

"That 'spy' we sent, who didn't return and wasn't meant to. Wasn't he shown everything first? He was like Cadji—a free gift to the enemy. Don't I wish Monty would be a mite more trustful, though!

"Here we are, all four of us partners in an enterprise. I bought in; you earned yours. Lord knows which way Oakes got his share, but he and Monty are old friends; I suppose that's the top and bottom of it. What I mean is, we ought to be told what's happening. If we come alive through this I'm going to have a different arrangement, or else pull out."

"What's the sense of all this tom-toming?" said I.

"I expect that's to make the enemy think our natives are drunk. The fake spy is sure to have told them there is plenty of kaffir beer and whisky among the stores.

"I can't see why he didn't send this crowd packing along with the few who elected to leave us," I said. "They are no use. They're only a nuisance, now that the portering's done."

"I suspect Monty didn't care to abandon them," said Yerkes. "Probably those who had anywhere to go went when he offered them the chance this morning. Besides if we had sent them all packing and remained here ourselves, the enemy would surely suspect a trap. This looks like combination charity and business.

"Look at it this way: Charles du Maurier—the one that's dead—lived in this place for years like a king. It's more than likely these have forgotten they ever had homes; they feel they belong here. On the other hand, suppose—gosh! It seems unlikely, but suppose it!—suppose we come out of this on top. The tribes hereabouts,

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who've looked up to the du Mauriers all these years, 'll likely be out of hand. They won't knuckle under to us right off the bat, and we'll need labor badly to work our gold-claims.

"Oh, I see the thoughtfulness of Monty's moves all right. I see the chess of it! But I'm —— if I see why he should keep it all to himself!"

MONTY got very busy that evening about an hour before dusk. We had supper by daylight in the open, Oakes hilarious and poking everlasting fun at Yerkes, Yerkes uneasy, Monty silent and inclined to brood, leaping into life, though, the moment we had finished eating.

"Ready?" he asked me. "Come, then."

He had not been so recklessly contemptuous of accepted strategy after all, for as I walked beside him toward where my crowd was still pounding the drums, some of our own boys, whom I had not noticed all day, came to him through the main gate. He stopped for a minute to question them, and they gave him short, affirmative answers with a great deal of emphasis of nodding heads.

"The enemy's spies have gone back to report," he told me. "We're not watched now—not that they could see us from below, but it's pleasanter to know we're enjoying privacy! Come on."

Close by the great gate, to the right as you faced it with your back to the house, the natural rock parapet was very steep and high—at that point for a distance of fifty yards quite unscalable from within or without. At some time or another a beginning had been made of a wall to enclose a compound there, perhaps for cattle. It ran, about eight feet high, for something like forty feet in a straight line from the gate toward the house, ending abruptly and uselessly, but forming a broad V where it met the rampart.

The sheds were nearly all on the other side of the nearly circular depression, on the left of the house as one faced the gate. Our mules, that du Maurier had stolen, were in one of them. Even while Monty and I approached the gate the dead robber's oxen, cows, and goats came through it toward other sheds, herded by naked boys. When the crack of doom comes the native children will not fail to drive the cattle home!

Monty told me to take some natives and bring our eight mules over into the V. When that was done we brought loads and saddles too, setting each in readiness beside each beast, and feeding them from wooden boxes taken from du Maurier's rough-lumber heap.

"So much for emergency," said Monty. "If the worst happens we can mount the mules and bolt. There's no moon. Any light from inside the camp will help us then."

"Then you do expect to be attacked tonight," I said.

"Who said so?" he answered. "I'm taking precautions. We'll make it hot for marauders, if that's what you mean. Now take all those natives of yours—men, women, and kids, and truss them up 'boardship style so that they can't stampede at the propitious moment!"

It was a tall order to make that number of humans fast between a quarter after five o'clock and darkness, but I did it. There was fifty fathom of one-inch hempen warp in one of du Maurier's sheds and I used that and some trek-chains, making the chains fast to great iron pegs at each end, and roping them to the chains by the neck. They had to lie down, but I gave them sacks to lie on, and they were not uncomfortable.

Then I tied their hands to their feet, and made their feet fast in line to another chain. I would not have chosen to be bound in that fashion myself, especially before the flies had all quit business for the day, but prisoners can't be choosers. One thing they had to be thankful for—that there were no mosquitoes on the hilltop.

While I was lashing them, and testing knots, Oakes and Yerkes with some of our own boys dragged du Maurier's great trek-wagons into line to form an angle with the unfinished wall of the V, and with the aid of various other bulky things dragged together, including firewood in great bales, boxes, and so on, before dark they had the V fenced off into a triangle.

"Any light from the center now will throw a shadow across most of this triangle," said Monty. "That's good."

Then he sent for Sixpence, and that redoubtable orator was set to work explaining to my trussed prisoners that any one making a sound after the order for silence should be given, would be killed out of hand. Sixpence illustrated the threat by drawing a

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long cook's knife from his belt and pretending to cut his own throat with the back of it. Monty added to the symbolism by presenting to me very formally his own repeating pistol.

"I shall leave Sixpence with you," he said. "He's to help you keep them quiet, without butcher-work if that can be prevented. Now—one more thing while we're all together."

We stood in a clump between the mules and my lines of prisoners, Monty leaning on his rifle, and I looking into the eyes of each of them with a strange obsession that I must because I might never do it again. Isn't a man foolish! What difference could it possibly have made, supposing we were to be scuppered in the dark, whether or not I had that last look into the faces of my friends? I remember I thought they looked casual—cool—indifferent, and I hoped I looked the same, but did not believe it.

"I want it understood," said Monty, "that whoever sees Cadji, supposing anybody does, is to catch him alive! We can settle with the du Maurier gang, I hope, ourselves. But the only chance I can see of our getting the Portuguese Government to give us real title to our claims is to hold Cadji prisoner. So let's catch him!

"Your business—" he turned to me— "is to keep these natives quiet. If the enemy comes it's a certainty he'll make for the house. Don't open fire unless he breaks in here, or unless he retreats from the house after getting there.

"If you do shoot, remember we others will take that as a signal to join you. Our game will be up then. We shall work our way toward you, jump on the mules, and bolt; that'll be our only chance. So don't shoot unless you absolutely must!"

By the time they three strode back to the house it was almost dark. I saw them reach it—noticed that some sacking had been draped around the platform on the roof, high enough to make a man seated on a chair up there invisible from below. I saw Oakes, rifle in hand, climb up the ladder to the platform; and then all grew dark.

The great subtropical stars came out, with the million noises of the night that constitute what townsmen think is silence. My prisoners breathed heavily and whispered now and then, but on the whole settled down for the night with fatalistic philosophy. The mules made more fuss than any one, for they had had no recent exercise; but Sixpence had a mulewise way with him, and petted them into more or less repose.

Lamps were lit in the house, for I could see the chinks between the corn-sacks we had piled within. But all was silence over there until at last I heard Monty's voice calling—

"How about it, Fred?"

A moment later Oakes' concertina split the night apart, and Oakes' voice lifted in uproarious song.

Never did a sober man sound drunker! Never did a chorus bellowed by two men from below create a better atmosphere of revelry by night! Never was song more suited to occasion:

"Oh, my name is Johnny Hall, —— your eyes, —— your eyes!"
"And I hate you one and all, —— your eyes, —— your eyes!"

A wonder of a song! The chorus, "—— your eyes! —— your eyes!" was accompanied by resounding thumps on the table below, while up above Fred's concertina laughed and carried on in harpy rhapsodies, while the pirate's account of his own forthcoming execution unfolded stanza by stanza to the unresponsive night.

"And the parson he will come, —— his eyes, —— his eyes!
To talk of Kingdom Come, —— his eyes, —— his eyes!
Oh, the parson he will come,
For to talk of Kingdom Come,
And he surely do look glum—oh, —— his eyes!"

I think it was at the parson verse—or perhaps at the point where the sheriff enters, "with all his ugly crew, their dirty work to do," that our own climax arrived. I had climbed into one of the wagons as the best place to see from without being seen, and I kept my eyes busy sweeping the line of the parapet, just visible like a pencil-mark in the velvet gloom.

But our enemy was too cocksure that night to trouble to swarm parapets. He came, all sixteen strong, marching up the wagon-road; and my heart stood still suddenly as I saw a man's full round head in a cowboy hat rise boldly above the level of the gate.

For two or three minutes it kept stock still. The song went on. The concertina raved and wailed. I wondered whether

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Oakes, singing away behind that sacking, had eyes enough to see as well, for it was a long shot in the dark from house to gate.

The song went on. They hanged Johnny Hall, and danced him over nothing in a noose, and the drunken chorus crashed and bellowed in such convincing style that, had I not known, I too would have suspected there was whisky flowing.

The enemy looked long, listened, and was satisfied. I saw the man with the cowboy hat climb on the gate, and three heads rose on each side of him. For a second then I thought I saw a match struck behind the sacking above the roof—Oakes told me afterward it was a candle he had all ready burning, inside a tin tea-caddy. He was heating the burner of the flare. But the song went on.

Four or five more of the enemy raised their heads above the gate, and at last their chief thought it time for action.

"Stop that ——-of-a-noise!" he roared. "Stop it naow! Listen to me!"

The song and concertina music ceased as suddenly as if some one had slammed a lid.

"Come aout an' shaow yerselves! Yer game's up! Ye're covered! I'm Anatole du Maurier, I am! Blood for blood; I'm here for Charlie's price! Come on aout and fight, ye —— *ruineks!*"*

One of his gang fired twice, presumably at a chink of light in the nearest window. That was the signal for them all, and they volleyed at random, swearing as they thrust in fresh cartridges. I wondered that the flash of their rifles did not betray my face behind the wagon curtain; but I suppose they were too bent on murder to notice me, just as I was too excited to remember Monty's orders to keep my prisoners quiet.

But for Sixpence, who did not neglect his duty, we might have been done for. He walked up and down between the prone ranks, swinging his naked knife above their faces.

At the fourth or fifth volley the lights inside the house went out—whether shot out or extinguished by Yerkes or Monty I could not guess.

"Come on aout an' fight, ye swine! Ye cattle-thieves!" yelled Anatole du Maurier.

But by that time Fred had the burner hot enough, and the answer was unexpected. The paraffin flare blazed out noisily, bathing the whole amphitheater in ghastly, bright light, dazzling the riflemen. I just caught sight of Fred Oakes clambering down the ladder—and they must have seen him too, for they sent volley after volley at the roof—and I heard the supporting pole splinter as at least a dozen bullets struck it.

But it takes a host of bullets to bring down a nine-inch hard-wood sapling, and the paraffin flare burned on. They began firing at the light itself, but failed to hit it.

There was no answering rifle-fire—nothing but silence from the house; and it began to rattle the du Mauriers.

"Yah! They're dead already! We've bagged 'em!" said a man I could not see.

"Fer the love o' God let's haope not!" sneered Anatole. "Let's haope we catch 'em alive. An' burn 'em alive!" he added with a hard laugh.

"Let's haope that's good liquor the fools were swilling!" said the man at my end of the gate.

"It was Charlie's liquor!" yelled Anatole, with an oath that distanced the angriest effort of any Bluenose bo'sun.

"I'm tired o' waiting, I am! I'm going to see! Remember the agreement—findings, keepings!"

One of the men jumped off the gate, ducked, and began to run toward the house. The slogan, "Findings, keepings!" proved too much for the rest, and they all surged after him, one or two still firing as they ran, and all cursing the yellow flare that showed them in pitiless outline. But there was no answering fire from the house.

It was at that moment that somebody climbed into the wagon beside me. I shut my eyes a dozen times in quick succession to accustom them again to darkness, stared hard, and saw Cadji's face! He did not see me yet. He evidently expected somebody. And somebody came.

"Is that you, Anatole?" he whispered. "It is right not to expose yourself. Let the others risk it! Of what use is a man's dead body?"

There was no answer, although there was certainly some one else in the wagon. I clutched Monty's pistol in a hand that trembled.

"Is that you, Anatole?" he asked again.

"No, my saffron hellion!" the unmistakable voice of Fred Oakes answered.

*Cape Dutch word—foreigners. Invariably a term of reproach.

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And that selfsame second Oakes' ten fingers locked with mine on Cadji's neck. We squeezed until I thought we had killed him. Then Oakes sat on him, searching him busily for weapons, finding two pistols and a knife.

"How did you get here, Fred?" I demanded.

"Crawled along the parapet. We all did. Watch!"

"Where's Monty?"

"You'll know presently. Watch!"

He pulled the wagon-curtain right back, and we both leaned out regardless of the risk. The house front door was bolted, and for the past minute the du Mauriers had been thundering on it with feet and hands.

As we watched they stove it in with their rifle-butts, and surged through into the pitch-dark interior. We could hear them cursing as they hunted for lamps, striking matches and getting in one another's way.

"Now for a volley at them, through the open door!" I said excitedly.

"Don't be a fool," Oakes answered. "Watch!"

We did not watch long—perhaps ten seconds longer. Suddenly the hill-top shook—there came a clap like thunder—the house shrugged itself—opened outward like a rotten packing-case, and leaped skyward in fragments amid flame and smoke. Monty had fired our blasting-powder.

The echo of the explosion rattled back from the parapets. There came a ghastly rain of timber, sacks of corn, roofing, and human limbs.

The mules wrenched loose their tethering-stakes, and stampeded all together in a line, to the awful consternation of my bound prisoners. The cattle in the long sheds lowed. The air became full of soot and particles. Some ruins caught fire, where the house had been, and then all was still again.

"Some little affair," said Yerkes, sticking his head into the wagon. "Where are you, Fred? Are you all right?"

"Right as rain, and I've got that wrong 'un Cadji!" Oakes answered gleefully.

"What's that?" demanded Monty's voice. "You say you've got the Portuguee?"

"Come and look at him! He's beginning to breathe again!" said Oakes.

I lighted a lantern I had stowed in a corner, and Monty looked in, his face smeared and bloody where some part of the house had struck him.

"Cut loose your prisoners," he ordered me. "Set some of them to catch the mules, and the rest to salvaging the corn before the fire spoils it all. Hurry!"

But Sixpence had the mules already rounded up and anchored; and as for the corn, I could no more make those frightened natives salvage it by the light of the smoldering ruins of the house than I could have induced them to run away and leave us before dawn. They would do nothing but sit huddled in a cluster. What corn was not scattered far and near, loose or in parts of bags, was burned, and I went back to the wagon after a half-hour's wasted effort.

WE SLEPT in the wagon, with Cadji tied hands and feet in the midst of us. And we breakfasted in the open at dawn, after I had seen most of the more disgusting mess cleaned up.

It was impossible to tell whether we had caught all sixteen du Mauriers in the trap. Oakes and Yerkes, who had tried to count them as they went in, both thought fifteen was the number. I had made no effort to count, and Monty, who had stayed to light the fuse before running for the parapet, naturally did not know. Cadji refused to throw any light on the matter, declining to say whether he thought Anatole du Maurier might have escaped or not.

"Never mind, *senhor*," said Monty, offering him a seat at our breakfast table, that Sixpence had improvised from barrels and planks. "We'll deal with you the same way, whether you tell us or not. Only one thing that can help you. When we get clear title to those claims of ours, guaranteed from Lisbon, you go free—not otherwise."

Cadji refused breakfast, although Sixpence had surpassed all previous efforts and produced a spread worthy of a great occasion. Midway through the meal he left us to remove about one-seventh of a man that we had overlooked between two heaps of wreckage. He tossed it over the parapet before Monty could stop him, and a vulture, plunging downward out of empty sky, followed the titbit to earth.

But, as I said before, there is something about breakfast that goes to the heart of all adventurers. If Cadji was no true adventurer, we were; and we made a famous meal.

"—— you, Monty, my boy!" said Oakes, half through it. "That was a top-hole plan! That was the best yet!"

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"I rather fancy it worked all right," said Monty modestly.

"Yes, but tell me this," said Yerkes. "Why in thunder, in the name of all that's blue, couldn't you tell a fellow what you aimed to do? Why the secrecy?"

Monty smiled broadly, holding out his cup for Sixpence—the only Shangan who ever made Christian coffee—to fill for the third time.

"Recall jollying me about the British army's reputation for strategic genius?" he asked, and Yerkes nodded.

"Well, the peculiar fact is, my dear chap, that in order to be promoted—I'm a colonel, for instance—we're obliged to study, and are very thoroughly examined in, strictly American—United States American—tactics. We have to study Stonewall Jackson. You might almost say that man's the tutor of the British army. He's almost deified."

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Yerkes.

He scented a jest at his expense, but Monty was serious enough.

"I expect it's the same with you over there as with us," said Monty. "In the schools they teach you every history except your own. You might say I know nothing about some of our best men, but Stonewall Jackson's a familiar friend. I know pretty well all there is to know about him. I remember things he is reported to have said, that I wouldn't be surprized to know you never heard of."

"Go on," said Yerkes. "I'll be the goat. Out with it."

"Somebody asked Jackson once for particulars of a plan he had in mind. He pointed to the buttons on his overcoat.

"'If those buttons knew my business,' he said, 'I'd cut 'em off at once.'

"Well, Yerkes, that's my way. I can't for the life of me help copying Stonewall Jackson!"

"Ah!" said Cadji. "Ah! I too know history. Stonewall Jackson was slain by his own men finally, was it not?"

Monty glanced at Yerkes, Yerkes at Oakes and Oakes at me. The Portuguese was standing between the table and the wagons, near a water-butt that I had caused to be filled the evening before for the sake of the mules and my prisoners.

"D'you think he needs a bath?" suggested Monty.

"I found him no nosegay in the night," said Oakes.

"Could we clean out his thinking-gear, d'you suppose?" said Yerkes. "That 'ud be worth an effort."

"In with him!" said I.

"All together then," said Monty.

The Portuguese kicked and screamed. He bit, and spat, and swore. But we brought that breakfast to an end by plunging him head downward into the water-butt, and left him, with short legs gesticulating wildly to an unresponsive sky, for Sixpence to pull out by the pants and wring, madder than a wet hen. Sixpence, of course, being black and a decent Shangan, was proud of the privilege of rescuing a "white" man.

AN INDIAN'S EXPERIENCE WITH MATCHES

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

A LIPAN Indian back in the early '70's was one day visiting at Fort Martin Scott in Texas. While he was talking to an officer, the latter took a box of matches from his pocket, scratched one on a stone and lit his pipe. The Indian watched the performance, greatly astounded, for to him the matches were nothing but little sticks. Several more of the matches were lighted for his edification.

Then the Lipan went to his camp near by and soon returned with half a dozen beautifully dressed wild-cat skins, which he offered in exchange for the magic box. The trade was consummated and the Indian went away greatly pleased.

Soon after the officer found the savage seated on a large stone, on which he was gravely striking match after match, which he would hold in his fingers until forced to drop it, and would then carefully inspect his fingers to assure himself that it was real fire that had burned them. The Indian continued until he had used up every match.

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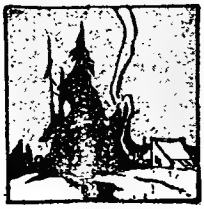
THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance: many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

IN HIS novelette, "When Kentucky Starved," and in some of his other stories, Hugh Pendexter gave us a living picture of those great frontiersmen and Indian fighters, Daniel Boone and Simon Kenton. In this issue he gives us in story form an intimate and carefully accurate picture of another great pioneer, Davie Crockett. Later will come tales of still others—Kit Carson and "Chucky Jack" Sevier (who founded the state of Franklin, now Tennessee), and still others of the hardy men who were not only frontiersmen but history-makers, and history-makers on a big scale.

Most of us have formed our idea of American history, if we have any real idea of it at all, from the dry and generally poor school histories that swamp us with dates and dull, lifeless, colorless statements of political progress, bald, uninteresting information on national events of moment, and so on. No wonder most Americans don't know the history of their own country!

AND yet what a wonderful history it is! A handful of whites put down on the shore-line of an unknown wilderness extending three thousand miles to the west of them, inhabited by an almost unknown race of savages. And now, only three hundred years later, behold! a world power of a hundred million people. A continent of wilderness fought over by Spain, France, Holland and England, and now that same wilderness takes a main hand in settling the fate of Europe and the world.

And who changed this wilderness to what it is now? Was it just the statesmen, politicians, governors and generals? Undo the work of Boone, Sevier, Crockett and Carson alone, and it might be that the United States would now be only the States along the Atlantic coast. In the real history of America the names of her adventurers, her pioneers, should be written side by side with those we now call our greatest. The writers of our histories have been poor assessors of values.

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TO MOST of us Daniel Boone was "just a great Indian fighter." Hugh Pendexter's stories have shown us that he was also a history-maker, a builder of empire, a founder of America. The history of our country, the real history, is crowded with other men who did the work of giants in making America, yet whose names are, to most of us, merely names or forgotten or unheard of. Our history is rich in adventures that make a fiction writer's efforts tame and dull, adventures that as fiction would be smiled away as incredible. For example, later on you'll read Allan Dunn's "Salt of the Sea" in which ten men left from Drake's ship in California, walk and sail their way down to Peru, then across the Andes, down the Amazon on rafts, take a Spanish ship and five get back to England. Quite a journey even today and with a sufficient outfit. What must it have been in 1580 through unknown wilderness with only savages and hostile Spaniards anywhere along the thousands of miles they traveled? Ten men! As a fiction story it is just an incredible lie. That would be your verdict or mine on reading such a fairy-tale. But it happens these men of Drake's did just that.

American history teems with such adventures. But we have been given only its dry bones in the schools and in many of the books we have read since school-days. Why should we not have some of the red blood as well? Real history is not merely a collection of skeletons. Nor can an American, particularly a foreign-born American, learn the true spirit of America and Americans by reading dates and dull records of bare events.

THE purpose of the stories in our magazine is to amuse. We are not conducting a school. The many stories we've published that have made historical characters vivid, moving human beings, or given true pictures of actual life all over our country at all times in our history, were chosen on their merits *as fiction* and, after passing the fiction test of our editors, passed the fiction test of our readers. They were good as *stories*. And naturally no intelligent man objects to learning something of value when he can do so without effort and by the simple and pleasant process of being amused.

Our magazine is an American magazine and I know you are as glad as I am that we can have in it stories that meet our demands *as* stories yet at the same time make us more familiar with our country's past and give us a fuller understanding of the men, the deeds and the spirit that have made her what she is.

Here is a brief word from Mr. Pendexter concerning his story in this issue:

Norway, Maine.

I have selected that period of Crockett's life when he was making a new start on the lonely Obion, as it afforded the best opportunity for fiction. The shadow of Murel, the super-bandit, was over the Mississippi valley, and Crockett was at that interesting point where political ambitions were awakening—the threshold of his entrance into national prominence.

THE flamboyant speech I put in his mouth when he first meets the men at Skow's trading-post is practically what he did deliver in a Raleigh tavern when on his way to Washington in the winter of 1827. The crowd did not give way and allow him a chance at the fire. When a young man yelled "Hurrah for Adams!" Crockett answered much as I have described. He says of himself at that period, "I was happy, devilish and full of fun."

Some may object to his avowed fondness for the "creature," but in that he merely reflected the manners of his time. His Americanism was a hundred and two per cent. There never was a more honest, courageous man in Congress. He actually lived his motto, "Be sure you're right, etc." It was impossible to bribe or bully him; and his wonderfully shrewd mind made it well near impossible to deceive him. We need Crocketts at Washington today.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

A WOMAN member writes from her home in Australia, asking us to enroll her boys, D. Doherty and B. Doherty, in our Camp-Fire. There is never any need to ask. Any one belongs who wishes to. Of course her boys are of our number and, as I wrote her, they have numbered themselves among a far greater body than ours—the millions who have eagerly offered their lives to the defense of humanity.

Her younger son, Brian, after being blown up by a shell at Gallipoli and spending six months in a hospital in Egypt, served eight months on the desert and then, after three vain efforts to reach France, "threw in" his corporal's stripes and got there as a private in 1916, serving at the Somme, Bapaume, Bullecourt, Ypres, Menin Road, Messines Ridge, Paschendaele, the Ypres Winter of 1917-18, Albert, and at the time of writing was one of the remnant of two thousand men of his division still on active service. He enlisted at seventeen.

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Here is a bit from his mother's letter. The "enclosed" refers to several newspaper clippings.

Do you think the enclosed entitles my boy to be a member? When war broke out August, 1914, he was a boy of seventeen out on a cattle station. He wrote to me to let him enlist but I thought him too young. He tried to get the owner of the station to write me and on his refusing, as he also said he was too young, he walked one hundred and eight miles to get to Sydney as they refused him any means of conveyance, thinking it put him off. He walked till his feet would stand no more, then sent to me for money for his fare to Sydney. I sent it at once and, when his feet were right, gave my consent for who could stand out against such persistence? When he was wounded at Lone Pine, Gallipoli, August 6, 1915, my only remaining son, his elder brother, went into camp (First Motor Transports, then Australian Flying Corps; now home after two years and a half). By Brian's latest letter, received yesterday, of June eighth he is near the Americans and says they and the Australians are firm friends and they mean business every one. Since that was written the boys under the "Stars and Stripes" have proved his words.

The following was printed in an Australian newspaper. It speaks for itself.

For Remembrance

A token of respect to the memory of the four manly men who were with me before we went "over the top" at Lone Pine Charge, August 6, 1915 (K. McPhee, J. Skinner, L. Buckley, and J. Collins).—From the only survivor that day of the five, Driver Brian Doherty, original D Co., 3rd Battalion, 1st Division, now with 1st Australian Siege Battery, France, still on active service.

"They owed their mother such a love
That only life could pay,
Who to Gallipoli bequeathed
The Freedom of the Clay."

AT THIS writing, November twenty-six, no one seems to know just what is going to be done with interned alien enemies and pro-German "American citizens." What *is* going to be done with them? Is our Government going to make welcome guests of the enemy aliens? Is the America they have tried to kill now going to become a happy home for them? Is the Government going to let perjured and traitor "American citizens" retain the citizenship they have betrayed?

The enemy alien has some excuse. The American traitor should at least be deprived of American citizenship.

OUR new metal identification cards seem to have "filled a long-felt need." But some of you haven't quite understood the terms. The paper cards are still free of charge but the asker must pay postage on his card, and is asked to enclose a stamped and addressed envelope, which also saves us clerical work at this end. The metal cards, on the other hand, cost you twenty-five cents but this includes return postage. To get a metal card, just enclose twenty-five cents and a self-addressed return envelope, no stamp being required.

I don't handle these cards personally and have just noticed that some of you are enclosing stamps in addition to the twenty-five cents. From now on the amount of such postage will be returned to the sender. But up till now this hasn't been done and our records would not show whether or not a stamped envelope was enclosed, so those who enclosed one will, I fear, just have to pay that small penalty for their mistake.

Those who send for cards hereafter will please remember this:

Pasteboard cards—free; enclose stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Metal cards—Twenty-five cents; enclose self-addressed envelope, *not* stamped; no return postage necessary.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, Robert Palfrey Utter rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine.

Amherst, Massachusetts.

I feel very much at home at any camp-fire with a frying-pan and blanket, but with a typewriter—that's different.

BESIDES, I am an owl-eyed professor, and I never had a real adventure in my life. I never even broke my leg except on a croquet-ground (that's a fact). Next to my family I love nothing so much as old books, unless it is the out-of-doors (I'll spare you the quotation from Chaucer). But, I repeat, I am thoroughly at home with the frying-pan and the rifle. I have walked literally hundreds of miles just for the fun of it, mostly within a triangle between Denver, Steamboat Springs and Glenwood Springs, and also much in the Wahsatch about Salt Lake. Before the mountains were infested with Forest Rangers and Fords, my father, my brother and I would tramp for two or three weeks at a time with blanket-packs containing corn-meal and bacon, sometimes on the trails, more often above or beyond them—you know:

"Sometimes we go where the trails are, but mostly
we go where they ain't;
We'd climb up the side of a sign-board, and trust
to the stick of the paint. . . .
And the wind is as thin as a whiplash, that carries
away to the plains."

I was born a bit more than forty years ago in Olympia, Washington, the end of the Oregon Trail.

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I went to school in Kansas City, Chicago, Cambridge, and Salt Lake City. I was an amateur writer of fiction at eight years of age, and an amateur editor at sixteen. I practised editing in college, on the *Harvard Advocate*, *Harvard Monthly*, *Harvard Daily News*. After graduating, in 1898, I became a professional, first on the *Youth's Companion*, then the *New York Evening Post*.

Then I spent six months in the saddle trying to pretend that I was the foreman of a dairy ranch at Santa Lucia, Mexico. I had the costume all right, and learned to swear volubly in Mexican-Spanish, but I wasn't much help to the owner, so I traveled back and did editorial work for a Boston publisher for a few years. Then I went back to the university, where I taught and studied till 1906 when I took my Ph.D. degree (or else they were kind enough to give it to me). That year I came to Amherst, where I am now Associate Professor of English.—ROBERT P. UTTER.

WHEN I first read Talbot Mundy's "Up-and-Down-the-Earth Tales" I wrote him that I didn't like *Monty*, that he got on my nerves just as he got on the nerves of *Yerkes* the American, and couldn't he tone *Monty* down a bit? I figured *Monty* would rile other democratic Americans as he had *Yerkes* and me.

Here is the letter in which Mr. Mundy knocks me out of the ring so hard and far that no undertaker is needed. It sounds as if he were mad. He wasn't. He and I have a pleasant little habit of pounding each other over the head and like each other the better for it. In this case I might dig up a small comeback or two but the honors are all his, and I'm pleased as he is.

BORN an Englishman, he has become an American citizen. If you want to know how good an American he makes, read a certain article in a back *Everybody's* that tells what he and Hugh Pendexter and a few others did to make Oxford County, Maine, one of the banner counties of the whole United States in all kinds of practical accomplishments toward winning the war. I wish we had a million more Americans like him.

Yarmouth, Maine.

Don't consider my feelings; I simply haven't any left after reading what you say about my friend *Monty*.

SEE here—from first to last I have never pretended *Monty* is a democrat. I don't pretend he's right. He's a character; and the proof he is one lies in the fact that you hate him. You wouldn't hate a nonentity, would you?

(As a matter of fact Lenine and Trotzky call themselves democrats—so does Hylan—so does Hearst. I'm not in love with the word.)

Monty is the type of man who led the men who died in Flanders. Under the mellowing influence of *Yerkes* I rather expect he will undergo a lot of transmogrification, if that's the proper word.

BUT the point of the story, which you say *you get*, and which I observe with gratitude that you consider makes good reading, is—when free men and true have elected a leader, then they shall obey him!

In course of my observations of the development of this great and greater growing land I have seen many a fine fellow in khaki wrestling with this question, put to himself by himself: "Why should I, a free man in a free land, submit my free mind and body to the absolute discretion of a man with whom I often don't agree, whom I regard on many points as a damphule, and whose personal attitude toward life's problems is not at all my notion of democracy? Here I am—in khaki—bound to obey! How do I justify it?"

YOU ask me to think it over. Gosh! Did I do no thinking before I took out final papers? I'm an American from choice, because I'm convinced that this America of ours begins to think at about the point where the rest of the world leaves off.

So if your readers are able to be perverted from the true path by the story of the views and unregeneracy of an imaginary English nobleman, then their democracy is slack in the back—and to —— with 'em!

Democracy is not "my will be done." Democracy is "*Thy* will be done, as in heaven, so on earth!"

An English nobleman who takes his election to be gang leader so seriously that he actually dares to imitate Abe Lincoln's method is *no* argument against democracy, but PROOF OF IT! Hurrah!

As Whistler said, I'm not arguing, I'm telling you!

Besides—*do* get this: I'm no lay preacher. I'm merely a recorder of what I see, using "fiction" for a method. If I can write good reading, yet preach no heresy—can a man do better?—TALBOT MUNDY.

AMONG the letters to Camp-Fire are a number from comrades who when they wrote were serving at the front against the Hun. There has not been time to publish all of them and now the war is over. But several bits from them make good reading still, and we all want to know about our Camp-Fire comrades and what they've been doing over there. So here are some scraps from their letters and a word about the writers.

Francis Rotch left Nenana, Alaska, in the Fall of 1917 for the O. T. C. at San Francisco where he won a captain's commission only to lose it the next day on account of his eyes. After two weeks he couldn't stand it any longer and enlisted as a private in the Coast Artillery Training Camp at Fort Monroe; 57th Engineers, Inland Water Transportation; sergeant; second lieutenant; France; transport work on the

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Seine, after trying to get to the front. His is a good motto: If you lose a captaincy, get in as a private.

Like Mr. Rotch, Charles M. Cosby of our writer's brigade, had had previous military training, having served as a private in the Philippines. After a course at an Atlantic seaboard training camp, the doctors found an entirely unsuspected weak spot and he was honorably discharged so suddenly that a recommendation for a captain's commission had to be recalled by wire. Our sympathy to him.

A letter from our comrade L. S. Phillips ("Shorty"), with the Canadians. He tells us of the death in action of an adventurer famous before the war, a man known to many of us:

France.

Of all the queer places from which to write this takes the cake. I am in a shell-hole in the front line of some of our newly captured ground, said shell-hole about three inches deep with mud and water. And it's raining like, well, like it *can* and does rain in this portion of sunny France. Still, there's no time like the present, and I welcome the opportunity of saying "How" to you and *Adventure*.

DOUBTLESS you have seen in the "dailies" of the work the Canucks have been doing. I have been in the thick of it. Believe me, I have had a few narrow shaves in my time, but until recently I never realized how close shrapnel and machine-gun bullets could come to one and leave him with a whole skin. And say, never let any one tell you that a boche won't fight; he will, especially his machine-gunners. Also some of his artillery. We captured a battery at the guns of which the crew stuck firing until put to the bayonet. Still, they are no match for *white* men. One real man can best any five of them. I have seen it proved over and over again. And when the dirty square-head is wounded he squeals like a stuck pig. His animal nature coming to the surface, I reckon.

I always was proud of good old Uncle Sam, but now, say, he sure is putting his heart into the work of making the world safe for democracy.

BY THE way it might interest you to know that Major Rasmussen has been killed in action. He, if you remember, was prominent at one time in the Mexican troubles. After obtaining a commission in the C. E. F. and winning the D. S. O., he transferred to the American Forces with whom he met his end. A better fighter and squarer man never lived.—L. S. PHILLIPS, Esq., C. E. F.

A. Judson Hanna, of our writer's brigade, has seen active service with Co. G, 30th Infantry, A. E. F. Charles F. Teske served on the U. S. S. *Arkansas*. Our old Australian friend, Harry C. Winters, went through about four years' active service in France.

When I heard from George T. Masury five years ago he was in Alaska, prospecting. After "wandering a bit" he arrived in the Philippines when war was declared and his last letter contains his kick because Co. M, 31st Infantry, of which he is sergeant-major, was held in the islands instead of getting to the front. He writes:

One of the old-timers here, left over from the Empire Days, died a few months back—"Old Kentuck." He went the way of most of the fellows—tropics and booze.

OF FORMER members of our magazine's editorial staff, George F. Olds has been in France a year with the Medical Supplies Dept.; E. C. Clayton has been at the front, but at this writing I don't know his regiment; Harry E. Wade, after passing up a commission chance at home so he could get to the front, was caught by the armistice before he had quite finished a special and second training at Camp Lee; T. N. Pockman is with the Marines in this country; James S. Hamilton has won his commission after being in ambulance work in France since 1917.

Erwin A. Walser served with Co. L, 23rd Engineers, A. E. F. Victor Hope was, or is, a lieutenant and the executive officer of U. S. S. *Winifred* under Admiral Sims. Jas. Jos. Gibbons ("Happy") is one of the Americans who didn't wait for America but joined up with the English, May, 1915. He wrote last Fall from hospital in England, recovering from shell-shock. (He wanted letters through "Letter Friends," and Bull Durham, but I suppose by this time mail will no longer reach 217484 .Sapper Jas. Jos. Gibbons, 2nd Canadian Engineers, at 3rd C. C. D., Seaford, Sussex, England. But a little Durham did go to him.)

R. R. Robertson, 12th Canadian Siege Battery, B. E. F. Lieutenant William H. Parr has been on special service with the A. E. F. after previous front-line fighting with the Canadians before America went in. C. F. Whiteley, wagoner, F. Co., 101st U. S. Engineers, went to France in 1917 and after graduating from motorcycle riding was the "pilot of a little Dodge" at last writing.

Corporal L. S. Longstreet, A. E. F., one of the first thousands to go over before the draft, writes:

Many of the Camp-Fire are in the Foreign Legion. . . . I met one one who was at the Camp-Fires

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of many moons ago and who died in the Lafayette Escadrille with honor.

Probably he means our young comrade Edmond C. C. Genet, who, as we know, transferred from the Legion to the Lafayette Escadrille and died in battle. He has talked at our Camp-Fire many times.

A letter from a New Zealand comrade, who has certainly been through the mill:

St. Albans, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Am a returned soldier, having left New Zealand with the Main Body in 1914 for Egypt. I was in the fighting at the Suez Canal. Left there for the Dardanelles. Was in the landing; it was a sight I never want to see again in a hurry. So you see I am a real Anzac. Was wounded the third day, after some good fighting with the Turk. Returned to the front again to have another argument with the Turks. I had better luck this time—was fighting for five months before I got my second and last wounds. I had been out getting some water for our wounded boys at a little risk of a sniper's bullet when all of a sudden I heard a shell coming, as I thought, over my head. I woke up on my way to New Zealand. I had been blown over Walker's Ridge with a couple of wounds in my left arm and a few minor defects. I have lost the use of my left arm. So I think I got out of it very well, don't you? I am at present a sergeant-major on Home Service till the end of the war. I am now settled and married to the finest girl in the world.—CHARLES H. GRAHAM.

Unable to get a stamp for return postage.

A line from our old friend, M. Logie, who served with the British on the Salonika and later on the French front in the famous Black Watch. We already know of his transfer to the A. E. F.

France.

You will note that I'm over here again, having received my discharge from the British Forces, thanks to the U. S. Military Attaché, London. Joined the old 9th U. S. Regulars. Took part in that grand counter-offensive on the Marne, July 18th—29th. Came out all O. K.

Being with the M. G. Co. of the 9th, we had some grand opportunities "at the retreating boche," as our English comrades would say. After that I had my chance to attend the Army Candidates School (A. E. F. of course). Was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant Sept. 19 and assigned to a negro regiment (U. S.) attached to the 4th French Army. Again went "over the bags."

On October 1—6 in the Champagne Drive—some old story of rear guard action with his Maxims. No need to mention the gunners—they either run, get stuck, or pull off the *Kamarad* stuff, which is only natural with the swine. Again pulled out O. K. At present we are away over on the right of the line. E. France. Things going fairly easy.

This outfit is composed of men (negro) mostly from the New England or North Central States. Good stuff.

Regards to all. Glad to report that I have made 1st lieutenancy lately. My regards to old New York; hope I'll see the old burg soon. Going on for four years since I left God's country to take my place in this affair.—M. LOGIE, Lt. Infy., 372nd R. T. A. S. M. G. Co. No. 2.

The above, of course, are only a small part of the comrades "over there" who have written in to us. Just those whose letters happen to be on hand at this writing. In our files are many other letters, often only brief "reports" of the writer's being at the front by land or sea, but those are older ones. A complete roster of all the Camp-Fire comrades who have served with the colors—well, it would be big enough for quite a few army divisions and quite a few full ship's crews.

To end with, here are parts of two letters from our comrade Donald Francis McGrew, an officer of the 103rd Infantry, written to Talbot Mundy more than half a year ago but still interesting. The writer, you will remember, had seen service as a regular in the Philippines.

France.

Just to let you know that I came through the last "trick," thirty-six straight days, in O. K. and am still kicking. We are behind the lines for a few days now, but of course we won't be out long. The regiments of the Yankee Division 126th never are.

While they have no great newspapers to spread broadcast the story of their every little deed, these quiet, clear-eyed chaps from the hills of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont are second to none—not even the Canadians or the beloved "Ladies from Hell" as regards their courage and soldierly possibilities. Certainly I knew what I was doing when I came all the way from Michigan to rejoin a Maine regiment. And I would do it again, for these lads have fulfilled my every expectation. The great majority of them ring true as steel in action, and I've seen them stand fast time and again under the ——est artillery and minenwerfer poundings that Fritz could possibly give them. Neither has Fritz ever captured any of the 103rd so far, nor has he been able to budge them from a single position they have held.

HOWEVER, it's all in the day's work and whether these lads get the newspaper "blow-ups" or not, we chaps from other parts of the country who have been with them know what they can do and are *doggoned* glad to have them under our command when the pinches come.

France.

I am afraid that this is going to be rather a disjointed letter—not even as well connected as the one which I wrote from the Soissons front. It took four days of "time snatching" to write that.

THIS is my third trip since then, on another front, and I have been in so long this time that I no longer remember the date we struck here. At any rate we hit this pulverized neck of the woods the day after the 104th's 2nd Battalion finished its ten-day scrap, and we've been going to it at intervals ever since. She am a hot one, this hole, when we all get going.

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By this time you've probably read the casualty list suffered by the 104th. That one battalion had at least 60 killed and about 100 wounded in the two days' shindy, but they piled up as many more boche, and then some. All told, there were nine attacks and counter-attacks in the two days, with the heaviest sort of shelling by both sides; and the Massachusetts lads retook the trenches every time. They were holding all but one when we came in, and no one was holding that—it had ceased to resemble a trench.

I reconnoitered it next day, and it was a shambles with broken equipment, dead boches, and bits of soldiers here, there and everywhere. Some of our own dead were still out in the wire. Our outfit went out and got them that night. The trenches roundabout were flattened out or filled in and many of the dugouts were reduced to piles of tangled wires and crumbled rock. Those minenwerfer and 150's are bad eggs when they land near you.

OUR 3rd Battalion took over and we profited some by some of the mistakes we understood were made in the scrap. The ground is rocky here, and a man below the level of the shell-hits is practically safe unless it is very close. So "Old Man" Southard had the boys lay low when a bombardment started, save for the unnecessary sentries and they never "stood to" until called. Meanwhile our heavy artillery and my "little heavies" gave the Hun —— and a little bit more; and Fritz never got to first base. We suffered few casualties, too. He kept us all awake for three days and nights that trip, but we've not been worried so much since then, and have, so far, been able to give him more than he sent.

(Interrupted again.)

THE 2nd Battalion of the 102nd got into a nasty slew about the same time, losing quite a number of men. I can't mention the place, of course. But there were some of them surrounded by boche for twenty-four hours. The machine gunners died on their guns, and although some were at first inclined to criticize them for allowing themselves to be outflanked, the nature of the ground and the dispersion of their line at that time made it practically impossible for them to do any differently. As it was, they counter-attacked with great fury and retook their former first line.

We are no longer "in" as "students," though of course we are still students in one sense of the word. While there is nothing so very complicated about this game, we will not be a professional army for some time to come. A soldier is a soldier, and a civilian is something else. But we are "in on our own," and if Fritzy's initial bombardments and barrages leave anything of us, we won't want to lose much sleep about our chances with an even number of his infantry. These young New Englanders can stand up under a heavy "crump slew" without getting unduly nervous; and, though they are inclined to throw all their grenades at one time now and then, they are learning fast and are ugly customers with the rifle and bayonet.

I WAS thinking the other day of some observations I have made since I struck France, and I intended to make a note of them but couldn't find them. Anyway, some at random might interest you, as I remember them:

I have yet to see an intoxicated French soldier, though they drink *vin rouge* as we drink water.

The Huns use bear-traps in No-Man's Land. Our patrols have brought in, not one, but dozens of them. The jaws have spikes that sink into the caught leg over an inch.

Many boys of 15 and 16 are being taken among other boche prisoners.

The Belgians are the most unpopular of the allied troops.

French soldiers are the best of comrades. I have never seen two French soldiers fighting each other.

I've never seen an American soldier fighting with a poilu. (But, believe me, I've seen American soldiers fighting one another! Ho, yass!)

Our soldiers use a lot of profanity but many of them don't realize how much less *filthy* language they are using now as compared to their talk of a year ago.

There is far less drunkenness in the service now than there was in "peace times" years ago. "Pay day" sprees are a matter of course, but they are not production of service crimes.

I have yet to hear of, let alone report or arrest, an American soldier charged with insulting a French girl or woman. There have been some minor disputes over the price of wine in cafés and occasional arguments over billeting arrangements, but no serious entanglements have come to my notice. The people of the town in which most of the 103rd were billeted asked that we be sent back there when we came out of the line the first time.

Tales of depravity and of drunken riots here behind the lines are pure bosh, save in very exceptional instances. The billeting areas that I have been in are Y. M. C. A.'s in comparison to many cities and small towns in the States. These boys behaved themselves —— well.

Too much credit can not be given the Y. M. C. A. for the work they have done.

MANY things have happened since I started in writing this letter. Nevertheless we are still here, holding the line and not attacking, it is true, but here just the same. God, I'll be glad when the whole American Army can dig in on a huge offensive and fight as so many fond but unmilitary people believe the American Army would fight! Just waiting for Fritz's attacks is not pleasant, even when you can stave him off and knock him galley west with all you've got. These boys *want to go over the top!* Hurry up with that blinking draft army that we read so much about.

The home company stood up against a hellish gas attack "somewhere in France" some time or other. Can't mention time or place. Fritzie shot over huge shells with projectors in a perfect cloud. I once heard a bombardment come with such intensity many of the men had no chance whatsoever to don a mask. The shells smashed in the doors of the dugouts, leveled parts of the trenches and literally plowed up their whole sector—all in the space of three minutes. The concentration was instantaneous. Then Fritz followed up with high explosives and though our artillery came back at once, the boys caught quite a strafing. I can't give you the extent of the casualties, but the people at home will have been notified by the time you get this. In spite of it all the boys did not want to be relieved—a necessity, as gas clings to the clothing—but were crazy to go over the top and

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back at them. Poor kids! They didn't have a ghost of a show against that damnable fire that night, but they were absolutely *splendid*.

At last reports Sgt. Bill was O. K.

WISH you could have seen another "incident."

More cheerful from our point of view. Oh, boy! If I ever get the chance to write the story of it! At some time or other somewhere in France we helped the French prepare a big raid made by the Madagascar "tar-babies." It was the best show I've seen. We gave Fritz intermittent barrages and bombardments on eight kilometers of front so they would not know the point where the blow was to fall, then combined all along just upon the zero hour, and kept it up for 45 minutes. Blowey—what a glorious racket!

And can't you see those black giants, most of them stripped to gee-strings, gripping their knives in their teeth and chanting in the trenches? They could hardly be held until the zero hour. Most of them had cut themselves a bit to smear their faces with blood, and when you consider that they are given to cutting their faces in youth to produce blood-scars, you can imagine how beautiful they looked. And when they went over the top—Oh, boy! Talk about the legion that went roaring down to die! They went at Fritz like a tornado let loose, breaking clear through to the fifth line. But I'll spare you the details. Suffice it to say that they did obey orders and brought back some prisoners—and some ears. Mostly ears. Perhaps I'm kind-hearted, but, when I saw them in the woods about nine in the morning, I could have hugged every one, ugly as they are. Huge, brawny, coal-black fellows, with gleaming teeth and laughing eyes—More power to their arms and good luck to 'em wherever they go. They are the boys to put the fear of God into the hearts of those sick wolves in front of us.

Must close now, as I have a lot of work to do.—MAC.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

We live in a time of many and mighty changes. Underneath all the changes runs one powerful, fundamental current—mankind's growing impulse toward a fuller and more real democracy and toward a brotherhood of man that will some day spread throughout the world.

There are many paths to this goal. We see the paths, but we waste time in debating which to follow, we divide and scatter ourselves over them all. For we do *not* clearly see the goal.

We want more democracy, but most of us do not clearly know what democracy is. Our idea of democracy is only general and careless. Almost none of us can reduce it to its bare fundamentals so definitely that we can apply those fundamentals as test and measure of every problem and issue, great or small, that can arise in a nation's life or in an individual's relation to that life. We do not clearly know what democracy is.

It is this ignorance of our goal that most impedes our progress toward it. The logical remedy is to get a clearer understanding, a more definite knowledge, of democracy's real nature and workings. This department is devoted to that purpose.

Democracy is not merely a machine for governing. It is a people's attitude of mind—principles and the daily, widespread, individual practising of those principles. It cannot be created by a vote or a revolution; it must be growth. The only way to stimulate a social growth is education. The particular work of this department is to help spread that education.

Strange as it may seem, such definite, fundamental education in democracy and its practical application is almost unknown. The need is so obvious and so elementary

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that it has been overlooked. Americans have been so careless, so selfishly busy or so absorbed in concrete issues that they have failed to examine carefully into the democracy that they boast and have even forgotten there is need of full, solid, thorough understanding.

If you believe in democracy it is your duty to make sure that you yourself have that thorough understanding and to spread it among others. This department offers you the opportunity to do both.

IN THE last issue we looked into the universal unrest into which the world has been thrown by the upheaval of the great war and found that the underlying cause of all this unrest is man's irresistible but somewhat blind impulse toward the attainment of full and real democracy.

And we marked out three great facts to bear in mind and hold fast to:

First—Democracy is not just a form of government, a piece of machinery. Democracy is a state of mind, an attitude and practise of a people. Forms of government are merely the result of that state of mind. Without it back of them they are artificial, unstable, almost valueless—merely the form, the shell, the mold without the substance to put in it.

Second—You can not get democracy by violating it. If you use autocracy to establish a democratic form of government, you get the shell, the mold, but you have not got the democratic substance to fill that mold, the spirit with which to inform the shell and give it life. Worse, you have poured *autocracy* into that shell—autocratic methods, autocratic habits of mind. You can not create with an ax the spirit of democracy.

SOMETIMES the ax, the use of physical violence, has been necessary. Probably when a people has not yet reached the first stage of democracy and has no legal voice whatever in its own government physical violence is the only means available. As in France before the Revolution or in Russia under the Czar. But only the form, the shell, of democracy can be thus attained; physical violence, no matter how democratic its start, has always quickly degenerated into autocratic methods. The French Revolution established the form of democracy, but its autocratic methods put autocratic power into the hands of one Revolutionary tyrant after another, later a second revolution of violence developed and the era ended with the Emperor Napoleon, greatest tyrant of them all, and a world-war from France's effort to force her autocratic sway upon all Europe. Then another French Emperor, and then, after some twenty years of trying to make autocracy, or a democratic mold filled with autocracy, act like real democracy, the French people settled down to the task of getting democracy by *living* it.

Russia is following the same long autocratic road toward democracy.

BUT a country like ours is a far different case. We have something of both the shell and the spirit already. Most of all, we have a peaceful, lawful, democratic means of shaping our government as we please. It is still an imperfect means, but it is amply sufficient for the need—if the people really use it as they have power to do. To use violence instead is to go backward, to revert to autocratic methods, to replace part or all of our democratic spirit and habit with autocratic spirit and habit. We can not get democracy by violating it.

Third—Autocracy is rule of the many by the few. It does not matter in the least who the few happen to be. Crowned heads or peasants; capital, labor or any other class; the heads of any religious creed; a political party or clique; politicians or public officials working for their own private ends; doctors striving to give their profession enforced power over the people—it doesn't matter which. *Any* few who rule or strive to rule the many are autocrats and their rule is autocracy. The few may claim, and believe, that their efforts are for whatever noble end you please, but, consciously or unconsciously, they are the enemies of democracy.

THAT is clear enough, yet most of us forget it in actual practise. As the most striking example take the case of capital *vs.* labor. After generations of it we are beginning to wake up to the extent to which we are autocratically ruled by capital. Its abuses of real democracy have been many and flagrant; its violations of the brotherhood of man are a stench in the nostrils. So a vast and mighty movement among us turns upon Autocrat Capital to dethrone him.

His most obvious crime is his oppression of Labor. The most obvious remedy is to free Labor from this oppression. So we are turning to that work.

BUT we forget something. Free Labor from all injustice and oppression, *but do not let Labor take Capital's place as autocrat.* That would be only a change of tyrants—still a Few ruling the Many. The cause of real democracy is no more the cause of one Few than it is of another.

Labor is the more human of the two and most of us turn to it more sympathetically. Also it has been the under dog. But we must not let our sympathies blind us. We must not forget that Labor has never given us any assurance—has hardly even pretended—that if it came into power it would be any less autocratic, any less class-selfish, any more fair to the rights of the majority than Capital has been.

ITS platform, first and last, has been the rights and gain of labor. By all means give Labor its rights, but how about the rights of all the rest of the American people? Labor wants the rest of the people to help it get its rights, but is Labor going to help the rest of the people get *their* rights?

THE oppression of Labor was formally so great and its cause so young that it *had* to concentrate on the immediate issue of protecting itself. But Labor has grown strong. Now that it is able to espouse a cause broader than its own interests, does it show any signs of doing so?

Until Labor definitely and unmistakably takes its stand, not for one class alone, but for the people as a whole, it is just as autocratic, just as much a menace to democracy and just as much an enemy to the people as Capital has been or is.

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IT DOES not follow that Labor is purposely or even consciously working against democracy. As in any great movement some of the leaders have no real aim but their personal power and profit, but Labor as a whole is not consciously any more undemocratic than any other Americans. If anything, it is more democratic. The trouble is that the issue, as it is being fought out, is strictly between Capital and Labor, neither side raising a banner for any broader cause or even seeing that this ought to be done.

A CHIEF reason for this lack of democracy, this lack of understanding and vision, lies right in this question: "What *is* Labor?" Or you might put it "What is labor?" or "*Who* is Labor?" Or might ask it the other way around: "Who are Capital?" "How much constitutes capital?"

Nearly all of us labor for a living. Nearly all of us have at least some capital. Where do you draw the line? There is a particular definite issue between the two, but the dividing line is invisible to both sides and neither side knows how many of the people belong to it. The people don't know either. It's all hazy and it's very easy for either side to imagine its cause is that of the whole people or of the majority. And also, is either side—or the people themselves—trying very hard to find out what are the interests, not of a class, but of the majority?

WE ARE all laborers. We are all capitalists. We, the American people, can not be classified into two definite groups. When you line up a Capital group and a Labor group there is left a third group who are as much one as they are the other, and no one of the three groups can be definitely marked off. The lines of division are hazy and very flexible.

The result is that, in order to make Capital and Labor stand out distinctly and assume a definite identity, we have to think of each in its extreme. We do not think of the small shop-keepers as Capital nor of the newspaper reporter as Labor, though one is an employer and the other an employee. No, we use the millionaire or the rich manufacturer and the mechanic or unskilled workman as the type of Capital and Labor respectively.

THE worst of it is that Capital and Labor define themselves in much the same way. Capital does not often think of the shop-keeper or other small employers as being in its ranks, or put forth effort to protect his interests. Labor does not often think of the reporter or professor as part of itself or put forth much effort to protect his interest.

NOW note this. As Capital has grown in power it has drawn its boundry line closer and closer, leaving an ever decreasing Few as the wielders of its power, and an ever increasing Many subject to them. The more power, the more definite the autocracy.

Labor acts the same way. As yet it has not gained the victory over Capital, so it keeps adding more and more of the in-between class to the one definite symbol it has, unionized labor, in order to get the additional power necessary to take control out of Capital's hands and into its own. But when it does gain control, as it surely will, it will do exactly the same as Capital has done—narrow its ranks down more and more to the few extremists, leaving an ever-decreasing Few to rule an ever-increasing Many. Labor and Capital are both essentially autocratic movements and one is as sure as the other to follow that autocratic path. With power in its hands, Labor will exclude more and more of the in-between class from its ranks. Like Capital, from the first it has been for part of the people, not all of them, and that autocratic habit will follow its inevitable course. As it did in France and is doing in Russia.

BUT a greater force than Labor or Capital is under way. Democracy. It will abide the autocratic rule of no one class. Economic systems and forms of government may, by bettering some conditions, blind the people for a while to the real lack of democracy beneath them. But sooner or later democracy will have its way. Now it is fighting the autocracy of Capital; later it will fight the autocracy of Labor—unless Labor is wise and of good intent and sees that the way to ensure its own cause *permanently* is to broaden it till it is the cause, always, of the people as a whole or of their majority, not of only a part of them divided off by attempted economic lines. All the economists in the world can not divide man into two or three distinct and definite groups or make their attempted groups "stay put."

REAL democracy is coming sooner or later. Labor can hasten it or delay it, Labor wants it as much as does the rest of the people, probably more than they. If it sees clearly it will hasten it, not only desiring it, but knowing that otherwise Labor will go down before the next autocracy or before the direct onslaught of democracy itself.

Capital can hasten or delay the coming of real democracy, by changing or not changing its class-selfish cause to that of the people as a whole.

The in-between class can hasten or delay it, perhaps more than either of the others—delay it by sleeping through the crisis or by carelessly considering a change of masters a solution, or hasten it by alertness and by holding fast to the fact that autocracy is rule by the Few regardless of who the Few may be.

AND all three can hasten it by finding out more clearly just what real democracy is. That is a plain, fundamental duty for all of us, and this little department of ours is for the purpose of helping, however modestly, toward that end.

If the case of Labor *vs.* Capital seems to have taken undue space in such a program it is because it is an immediate and probably the most important concrete issue that Americans face to-day and because it involves so clearly the difference between democracy and autocracy. If the discussion has seemed general and abstract as opposed to particular and concrete it is because our real subject is not Capital and Labor but the general, abstract, fundamental and everlasting principles back of the struggle between these two.

LATER we will consider some of the essentials to a right form for democracy, and, after that, democracy itself—the spirit, state of mind and practise that alone are democracy and that must fill the form before the form can be of real value.

Then we'll see what we can do as our share in developing that state of mind and practise. Be patient if at first I do all the talking. It seems the quickest way to get the subject before the house for consideration and action.—A. S. H.

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VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *postpaid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp at the Front, or in Hospital.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those who have fought in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

SUPPLY SERGEANT FLYNN, Co. B, 113th Infantry, A. P. O. 765 Am. Ex. Forces.

"LONELY JOCK," care of *Adventure*.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL SELL: September 1, 1917, to September 18, 1918; 26 copies at 15 cents each.—J. S. SMITH, Box 135, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada.

WILL SELL: Copies for last year and this year. Fifteen cents each, postpaid.—J. MOLONEY, JR., 321 Adelphi St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1302 N St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 33d Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship; navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S., should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay: river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially*, early history of Missouri Valley.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 4249A Juniata St., St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Omaha. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

10. Western U. S. Part 4 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

11. Mexico Part 2
WILLIAM BROCKWAY, Oriental Park, Marianao, Cuba. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, 5036 Utica St., Denver, Colo.

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Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. Ry. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Clear Lake, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food, physics, hygiene; mountain work.

17. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, Honolulu, T. H. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

18. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, 84 Court St., Brooklyn, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
(Editor to be appointed.) Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios. (Mr. Ritchie, the former editor of this section, is now in France. His section is accordingly in abeyance until we find a suitable successor.)

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U.S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada County, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, care Authors' League of America, 33 West 42d St., New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner; R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't. of Com., Wash., D. C.

* (*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

Riches of the Rockies

ARE the States which look toward the Pacific all right? And have they minerals to burn? And game? And fish? Well, we'd be afraid to be within arm's reach if we contradicted Mr. Harriman:

Question:—"Being a constant reader of the *Adventure* magazine, I am taking advantage of the 'Ask Adventure' bureau to find the answers to the following questions. Could you let me know the mines, minerals, mountains, game and fur of the States of Oregon, Nevada, Arizona and Utah, also "California? I shall also be further obliged if you could advise me as to the prospects of a fellow getting on in these States, generally prospecting, shooting, etc. Enclosed please find a stamped and addressed envelope for the requisite answer. Trusting that my questions are conformed with the general conditions and thanking you in anticipation for an early reply."—D. I. HARTLEY, Melbourne, Australia.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—It is rather a large contract you have given me and it would require a library to tell you all there is to tell along these lines. One is supposed to ask specific questions along certain lines, not to ask for general information of a sweeping character, but I will do what I can for you. In the first place, I would advise you to get hold of the books of Le Conte, John Muir, John Burroughs, Clarence King, Stewart Edward White and Wm. H. Rideing, and read what they have to say about our Western mountains.

Taking your questions in order:

First, mines. This State produces more gold than any other in the Union, but Arizona leads it in copper. Utah has great deposits of coal and iron. Arizona has besides copper, gold, silver, tungsten, manganese, strontianite, lead, and minor minerals.

One copper company earned enough to pay two and three-quarter million dollars in dividends last year. The United Verde Copper Co. paid over seventeen millions in twelve years' operation. In this State one county has yielded over one hundred million in gold in the last fifty years.

Nevada excels in its great silver lodes that have

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been worked over seventy years and in its four big gold-camps, Tonopah, Bullfrog, Rawhide and Searchlight.

Oregon has few mines, but there are a few copper claims south of Salem and they used to mine a good deal of gold in eastern Oregon, but now the industry is dead there.

In the desert country of this State and Arizona are found masses of borax, salt, potash, etc., and much gold. In two counties this State has big deposits of iron and some soft coal. Some coal farther north, too.

Mountains. The mountains of Nevada and most of Arizona's southern part are barren, rocky, as are those bordering our tropic valleys of Coachella and Imperial. The Rockies that run from Alaska down, just east of our State, are wonderfully picturesque, outdoing the Alps if I may trust the judgment of a British friend who has been all over both. In this State we have the High Sierras, the Sierra Madre and Coast ranges, all well watered and forested, full of game and fish and very beautiful. Mt. Whitney, our highest peak, is about two hundred miles away and around fourteen thousand feet high.

Utah mountains are broken up in spurs and peaks and ridges that have little apparent relation.

Our State has many great forests in its mountains and Arizona has two big ones, Coconino and Apache, forests of pine, as well as many small ones. Nevada has none of note; Utah none worthy to call great. Oregon is heavily forested in the west and northeast, but the southeastern portion is sandy with sage-brush over it.

We have eight kinds of trout in the west: Dolly Varden, Cutthroat, Golden, Rainbow, Spotted Brook, Loch Levin, Steelhead, Lake, besides the land-locked salmon and Spring salmon. We have bass, carp, and perch. In the sea along our coast we have striped bass, white bass, yellowtail, albicore, blue-fin tuna, yellow-fin tuna, croakers, surf fish, halibut, rock cod, barracuda, swordfish, jew-fish, etc.

In our mountains we have bear, wolves, coyotes, bobcats, ringtail cats, civet cats, raccoons, cougar, martens, mink, weasel or ermine, lynx. The above lists comprises our fur-bearers. Then we have deer, ducks, geese, sandhill cranes, grouse, doves, quail, bighorn sheep and elk. The last-named pair are protected all the year 'round and the fine for killing is five hundred dollars. All game is protected part of the year. So are trout.

Game is not allowed to be sold in this State and some of the others at any time. You may shoot for your own use only. A prospector who kills for his own dish is not bothered by wardens.

Prospecting is a gamble, pure and simple. You might do well and you might not do at all.

For Trappers and Hunters

IF ANY of those who shoot and snare in the far places desire to get a lot of mail with which to relieve the tedium of dull days, here's their chance. Even a mail-order catalog is good reading sometimes:

Question:—"I desire to get the names and addresses of trappers and hunters in the district covered by you, for the purpose of placing them on mailing lists. Can you advise me how they can be obtained? Thank you for the information."—GEO. P. HARVEY, Denver, Colo.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—The only way I know to obtain the names and addresses of hunters and trappers in this district would be to write the Ontario License Commissioner at Toronto, asking him for the names and addresses of those who have taken out hunting and trapping licenses for 1918. Whether he would give them to you or not is a problem I am unable to answer.

Or you might obtain a few of them by writing the issuer of such licenses in each town and village in the district. Dr. McLeay, Druggist, is the issuer here. Or yet again if your interests didn't clash with those of the raw fur-buyers John Hallam, Ltd., 111 Front St., East, Toronto (the largest raw fur-buyer in Canada) might give you their list. *Might?*

Sorry I can not help you further.

What Mexico Offers

NOT butting into anybody's affairs, of course; *but*, personally, if I were a telephone repairman I'd do all my trouble-shooting on this side of the Rio Grande:

Question:—"I am interested in Mexico and am thinking of going there some time and would appreciate any information you could give about the country.

"What are the leading industries, and how is the climate? Is there any chance there for a working-man to make good? I have heard that a white man working for a living, in most tropical countries, is looked down upon. Does this apply to Mexico?

"I am a telephone repairman by trade. Would my trade be of any value to me in Mexico? I have worked in about thirty different States at various things—teamster, ranch hand, farmer, etc., and am used to roughing it.

"If this letter is printed in *Adventure*, I would rather not have my name and address mentioned."

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker, predecessor to Mr. Brockway:—Your letter was received during my long absence from home, so pardon the delay in answering.

You want to know if there is a chance for a white working man to make good in Mexico, etc.

The natives look down on a white man if he goes to the fields or does any such work as that, but a man in Mexico doing other outdoor work is no more looked down on than in our country. I should think that you are qualified to hold down almost any position out in the open, and since the trouble that has been going on in Mexico, imagine that a good telephone lineman would get in a pretty soft job.

Farming, stock-raising and mining are the chief industries.

After Columbus discovered the West Indies the neighboring coast of the mainland was visited and settled. Thus the Spaniards came in possession of Mexico and some of the country north which now belongs to the United States. Explorers found so much gold and silver that many Spaniards settled there. They opened mines, started coffee-plantations, farms and cattle-ranches. Many intermarried with the Indians, so that Mexico has a varied population. There are savage Indians, half-civilized Aztecs, Spanish and Indian half-breeds and some pure-blooded Spaniards.

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Mexico has four different kinds of climate to correspond closely with the four areas of different altitudes. The low coastal plain near Vera Cruz and in Yucatan has the hot climate of the tropical zone with an abundance of rain brought by the damp winds that blow across the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea.

On the slopes west of these plains the temperature is not so hot but there is much rain. This belt has the sub-tropical climate. The interior plateau is so high that the climate is temperate even in the part that lies south of the Tropic of Cancer; but there is so little rain that the country is arid. The climate becomes steadily cooler the higher one goes.

Even within the tropical zone there are places among the mountains where the snow never melts and where there are true glaciers. On these high mountain slopes the rainfall is quite heavy.

You did not speak of any particular part of Mexico; if you want to know anything else, shall be glad to have you write again.

Deep-Sea Diving

IF, NOW that peace is here, our wartime adventurers should find their old occupations boresome, they can get a thrill or two out of the job which this inquirer wants to learn:

Question:—"I would like to know about deep-sea diving. Am twenty-seven years old, five feet ten inches tall, weight two hundred pounds, forty-four inches chest, thirty-five waist, good heart, do not drink.

"What kind of work would I have to do until allowed to go down? What is the pay for both? Where are the best companies? What are the risks?"— ——— ——, Buffalo, New York.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—The work of a diving-crew consists, besides actual diving, in tending lines, telephones, air-pumps, hoists, etc., and other duties at the discretion of the foreman or captain of the gang.

The chief concern in the East is the Merritt & Chapman Wrecking Company, 17 Battery Place, who will no doubt inform you as to the necessary preliminary work required, and if you seem desirable to them will almost certainly take you on.

I can not tell you what rate of wages obtains in this profession; but the rates are high, and go higher in proportion to the danger of the job. There are very few risks attached to the actual diving so far as going down and coming up are concerned; the principal causes of accidents are such things as lines becoming entangled in the work engaged on, portions of wreckage falling down on a diver, and similar things, but the percentage of serious mishaps is small as a rule.

A very good plan for you to follow, I think, would be to enlist in the Navy and enter the Diving Branch. A man is thoroughly taught the business there, and, except on practise descents, or in training, receives extra pay at the rate of $1.20 per hour while actually submerged. Then when your enlistment is up you will find plenty of demand for your services in any of the big wrecking and salvage companies at the high pay due to the trained man.

If this method appeals to you, write to the Commandant of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, New York. Otherwise apply to the Merritt & Chapman Wrecking Company or any similar concern nearer to you. There should be diving firms in Buffalo, engaged in lake work. One of your local newspapers will tell you where to find such a concern.

I'm sorry I can not give you more definite figures as to wages; but from the rate of extra Navy pay you will readily see that the money earned by the professional diver is extremely good.

'Ray for Vancouver

"HOW can I get a homestead of my own?" That is a question that comes to our "Ask Adventure" men from scores of inquirers. As for Mr. Carson, he's strong for British Columbia:

Question:—"Being a regular reader of *Adventure* magazine, I wish to take advantage of their Information Department, and address you the present letter requesting certain particulars regarding Vancouver Island, B. C. To come straight to the point, the information desired is as follows:

"1.—What are the general climatic conditions around Victoria, both Winter and Summer?

"2.—How are living conditions, both as regards comfort, convenience and cost?

"3.—What class of farming pays best, fruit, vegetables or live stock, and what particular branch of each? I am particularly interested in potato growing on a large scale, or one other favorite vegetable or fruit.

"4.—Will the local markets take care of all one produces, or is it necessary to ship when producing on a large scale?

"5.—Could you put me in communication with some one handling the purchase and sale of suitable farm sites close to Victoria?

"6.—Is young farm labor available, and about what is the average wage paid?

"I desire the above information to apply to more or less normal times.

"I am sorry if my questions are numerous or troublesome, but I am anxious to get all the information possible regarding farming around Victoria (which I understand possesses the best climate), so that all particulars and illustrated pamphlets, etc., you may be able to send me will be very greatly appreciated."—FRANK O. GROUNDS, Mexico, D. F.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The climate of Victoria is one of the best in the world. It ranges from an extreme of eighty in the Summer to a few degrees below freezing in Winter. These extremes are rare and of brief duration. The rainfall in Winter is less than almost any other place on the coast while the scenic surroundings are beautiful. On this point I can speak positively.

As to your other questions, I have forwarded a copy of them to a reliable source whence you may expect an answer within a few days of the receipt of this. Frankly I am not a business man and am rather reluctant about advising any one as to where or how he can make a whole lot of money. It is something I have never done myself, hence the feeling of incompetence.

I will say this, however; that I know of no place where a man with energy, experience and small

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capital can do better than on Vancouver Island; while as for the products I believe that anything but the citrus fruits can be raised successfully. It is an ideal poultry country with a practically unlimited market right at home.

Write the Deputy Minister of Lands, Victoria, B. C., for general information and maps of the island.

How about Honduras?

GOOD luck to the adventurous one who would homestead a farm to raise corn and hard wheat in Honduras! May he find much rich land, and get it cheap:

Question:—"I wish for information concerning the land laws and homesteading terms for settling in Honduras. I am a practical farmer, of small means. Am not interested in bananas, coconuts, or coffee.

"Are corn and hard wheat feasible for making a good living there? Can a farmer of small means make a good start on the lines indicated by homesteading? What may land be bought for? Would it be practicable to use the rivers for transporting the crop to market?

"I have worked Mexicans for years, and have a smattering of that language. Is the language of Honduras similar?

"Please use enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope for reply."—A. C. PIERCE, Perry Landing, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—I am attaching a monograph dealing with general conditions in Central America.

Please write direct to Dr. Wm. C. Robertson, Galeras, Olancho, Honduras (5c stamp), who is located in one of the best farming and grazing districts in Honduras and who will furnish you with the current prices.

Both corn and wheat grow in this district; but what farming is carried on by the natives is done in a very primitive fashion and although it is hard to say what success could be made by homesteading and farming in real American fashion I have no doubt you could make a success of it.

From a Man of Many Trades

MOST of us are satisfied when we have mastered the intricacies of one skilled occupation. But not this inquirer:

Question:—"Having read *Adventure* magazine of the last few issues, I have seen your name in the information column. I would like to ask you a few questions concerning Arizona as to living conditions. Would it be possible for a young couple to come from Pennsylvania and start in making a living upon arrival?

"Kindly let me know as soon as possible what success you think I'd have, as for trades I am a steel-worker, barber, silk weaver and locomotive fireman. Of course you may think I am foolish for leaving here, but my wife's health demands a change of climate and my doctor recommends the Southwest.

"I am conforming to the rules as outlined in 'Ask Adventure,' and will appreciate any information concerning my questions."—R. E. JONES, Pa.

"P. S.—I might add that I have no objections whatever to New Mexico."

Answer, by Mr. Robertson:—If you are proficient in all of the trades of which you write I can see of no reason of your not getting work in a very short time if you came to the Southwest. There is a steady demand for labor of all kinds in all of the cities of any size. The State of which you write, Arizona, is out of my territory. Would suggest that you write Mr. Harriman; he is editor of this department.

There are plenty of towns and cities in New Mexico and Texas where you could have no trouble in getting work, if you are master of all the trades of which you write. You should have little trouble in any town or State in the union, as I am sure there would be a demand for one of your trades. If you should decide to come to Texas or New Mexico, I should be glad to advise you, and give you all the information I could.

Mr. Harriman's address is E. E. Harriman, 2303 West 23d Street, Los Angeles, California. He will gladly answer any and all of your questions.

Tripping the Rivers

SO MANY friends have queried Mr. Spears on this subject that he has prepared the following form answer:

There are 10,000 miles of water navigable for steamboats in the Mississippi River Basin, and probably more than 50,000 miles of stream easily navigable with skiffs, canoes or small house-boats.

Large streams, as the Missouri, Upper Mississippi, Ohio, Lower Mississippi, and nearly all the bottomland streams (White, St. Francis, Yazoo, Black Atchafalaya, Arkansas, Red, Illinois, Tennessee, Cumberland), offer better opportunities for house-boats than for smaller craft, as canoes or skiffs.

When one goes in a canoe, it means sleeping on the bank; in a skiff one can sleep on the bottom, with a canvas over the length of the boat; a small house-boat, one 20 to 24 feet long, say, is always dry, the bunk is always ready, and one cooks on a stove.

The Missouri is navigable for house-boats from Fort Benton to the mouth; the Mississippi from St. Paul to the Gulf of Mexico; the Ohio from Pittsburg to the Mississippi; the Tennessee from Knoxville to the Ohio; the Illinois, Red, Arkansas, Yazoo, St. Francis, White, and dozens of other streams offer similar opportunities on a lesser scale.

A small house-boat, scow hull, rough, roofing-covered cabin, may be built for $50 or less; a 25-foot boat, 15-foot cabin, fully equipped and furnished, might cost $150 or more. The boat is steered with long sweeps or oars; it should draw from four to seven inches or more; a 28-inch deep hull is enough for the Lower Mississippi.

The current flows from six or eight miles an hour in the Missouri to four miles in the Lower Mississippi; floods flow faster, and on some crossings and shoals, much faster.

Maps of the Missouri may be had from U. S. Engineer Office, Kansas City, Mo.; of the Upper and Lower Mississippi, and the Mississippi bottomlands, from Mississippi River Commission, St. Louis, Mo.

In outfitting a cabin boat, rope, pump, calking,

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paint, ax, shovel, skiff, should be considered. Furnishings: bunk, hammock, folding cot, iron bed; blankets, mattress; stove, cooking outfit, dishes; chairs, table, something to read, to write with; grub-box, shelves with cleats or doors; pails, wood-box, mosquito-netting (Summer); clothes, including overalls, slicker or waterproof coat, etc.; rubber boots, slippers, shoes.

A skiff outfit: canvas to cover hoops along full length of boat; oil-stove to cook on; hammock or canvas bunk or folding cot; woolen blankets; cooking outfit; shore tent; grub-box; clothes-case; line for mooring and anchor (10 pounds, say); tip oars with copper or iron; keep weight under 150 pounds.

Canoe: compact cooking outfit, small tent, blankets wrapped in waterproof tarpaulin 8x8 ft. square; grub packed in tight cans; the lighter the outfit, the better. Folding cot, or hammock, if room enough.

Alaskan Opportunities

AND now for our own big territory—Alaska, the land of fertilitity and plenty, gold and adventure—and lots of good hard work:

Question:—"What are the working conditions in Alaska? What are the rates of pay?

"What part would you advise me to go to, that is, fellow who expects to make money by labor? "What can a fellow really make at labor?

"How much colder is it in Alaska than in my State?

"Could a fellow work part of his way up? About what would it cost to go from my State to Alaska?

"Please sketch my route from West Virginia to Alaska."—MARVIN L. PAINTER, Arthur, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—Working conditions much as elsewhere. The food served men has usually been better than the average in the States. The pay also has averaged fifty per cent. more, but in the present inflated condition of rates prevailing here I am not sure that the Alaskan scale would be much better. Alaska has always paid the laborer more proportionately than the mechanic or skilled laborer.

I could not advise you as to where to go, for you can see that if one part was much better than another, it would soon become known and more people would go there and soon correct the difference. It depends upon the climate you like, the amount you are willing to spend to get there, the kind of work, and the like. You can find work in any of the settlements. In the Yukon basin, or anywhere in the interior the wages are usually higher and as a rule there is less competition. The average price of labor, taking skilled and unskilled, is about four dollars or five dollars a day, net, but the fluctuations are great from a number of causes.

The climate is warmer and wetter on the coast than in the interior. The length of the Winter is also longer in the interior and farther north. Of course Alaska is colder than West Virginia, but I never heard many complaints about Alaskan climate. Where the Winter is long and severe, the climate otherwise is good, that is it is dry, still, sunny, free from wind and sleet storms, etc. The south coast is rainy and foggy and there is considerable snow, but the cold is not greater than in the United States, in fact less so than in the East and Middle West.

It is by no means certain you could work your way up, for there are too many, usually, who wish to do this. However, if you engage yourself beforehand you would be likely to have your fare paid. Your route would be Seattle and then *via* steamship to your port of entry—wherever you were going. Don't expect great success at first, for conditions must be learned, as in everything and everywhere else.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

VON HACHT, WILLIAM. Also known as DON W. SMITH. Born in San Francisco, Calif. Last heard of with the Fourth Texas Cavalry, during the trouble on the border. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated.—Address MRS. M. E. VON HACHT, 629 Jones St., Oakland, Calif., or PRIVATE L. J. VON HACHT, care *Adventure.*

RUTHERFORD, JOHN, SARAH WOODS, EMMA RUTHERFORD and LENA RUTHERFORD. Who lived in Botetourt Co., Va., in 1884. Brother and sisters of my mother, Mrs. Mary Etta Rutherford Harlow. Any information concerning them will be greatly appreciated.—Address MRS. JOHN A. PITTSLEY, 726 Williams St., Youngstown, Ohio.

MOSHER, HUGH. Worked with him in Auto Body, Lansing, Michigan. Enlisted in June or July, 1917. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated. —Address F. PARSHALL, 10 Southard St., Trenton, N. J.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BRADT, CHARLES EDWIN. About thirty years of age, tall, dark, black hair, prominent front teeth. Ran away from home at Bridgeport, Conn. about fourteen years ago. Believed to have gone West on Government land or in Army. To his advantage to communicate with inquirer. Friends knowing his present or past whereabouts please also advise.—Address C. H. F., care "Lost Trails," *Adventure.*

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ROBERTS, ORA FRANK. About twenty-five years of age, tall, well built, fingers lost in dynamite explosion. Last heard of working in quarry near Red Granite, Wis. Was in Wis. N. G. in 1916.—Address PRIVATE FRANK PARTRIDGE, care of *Adventure*.

WOOD, BEVERLY. Please write and let your friend know where you are, or better still come to me if you can. You know my address in New Mexico. Your old pal, "MITCH."

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

KING, SERGT. F. W., U. S. M. C. Last heard of on the U. S. S. *Utah*. [Any one knowing his whereabouts please write.—Address B. O. Raney, Barracks 273, League Island, Pa.

WALKER, RUPERT H. About five feet six inches tall. Dark complexion. Twenty-eight years of age. Any information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated.—Address MRS. HARRY WALKER, Box 218, Rancocas, Burlington Co., New Jersey.

SCHLEP, ROY E. Last heard of in Old Mexico running a gasoline launch, about six years ago. Write to your old pal who was with you at Monte Cristo and Guadalupe Ranch.—Address ZENO, care *Adventure*.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the Mid-January or First-February issues of Adventure. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

BAKER, R. W.; Brockman, C. A.; Carlson, Nels.; Caxter, Charles B.; Fisher, Elmer; Foose, James O.; Harrison, William; Herrod, William; Hughes, Wm. P.; Hunter, Clifford Todd; Inge, Jim; Laing, Harry; Langford, George Washington; Lorntzen, Chris.; Lewis, Beny; Love, Mrs. Marie, Violet and Daisy; Meonis, Wm. J.; McMurry, Mrs.; Robbe, Perry; Sayers, Robert E.; Wilson, Clarence.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GALBREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Leo Hays; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Christian Baun; O. B. Franklin; Cole Williams.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. COX, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST MARCH ADVENTURE

Eight other stories, besides the three mentioned in the ad on page 2, will come to you on February 3d when the First March Number is in your hands. You will find:

ALIAS JOHN DOE — *By Hapsburg Liebe*

The man who called himself *John Doe* would not fight. But one day the logging-camp got a big surprize.

FINISH THE FIGHT — *By Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.*

When *Jim Cairn* brought news of his strike *Sigel Tench* schemed to collect an old debt—plus a great deal of interest.

MISDEAL — *By Ben F. Baker*

One was Irish, one Dutch, one Swedish, and one French-Canadian. No wonder complications started when *Gumbo* went into the stew.

A HANDMADE HERO — *By Terry Ramsaye*

A six-foot brawler sentenced to jail for twenty years for killing a man doesn't seem good hero material—but politics is an important game.

ALONE — *By Gordon Young*

A shot in the night as he steps out of the cabin door, and the sheriff falls flat to begin his all-night vigil—alone.

THE FINISH — *By Holda Seare*

Thrown from his horse, lying faint on the edge of a cliff, *Jim Gardner* meets the terror of the desert.

THE DANCE OF THE GOLDEN GODS III — *By Stephen Chalmers*

Up the deadly river go *Dickon Bulshead* and his mates, seeking the mountain of gold and finding the mysteries of the dance of the golden gods.

THE HAUNTING OF THE *LADY SHANNON* — *By William Hope Hodgson*

Fear was the means by which *Captain Jeller* ruled his crew, until one night fear came on the bridge to rule *Captain Jeller*.

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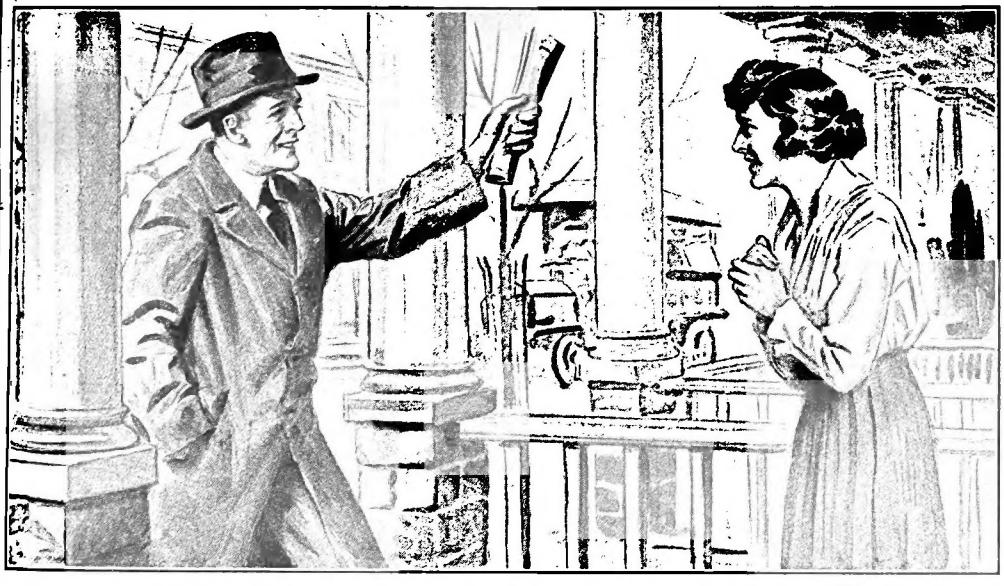

"$100 a Week, Nell!

Think What That Means To Us!"

"They've made me Superintendent—and doubled my salary! Now we can have the comforts and pleasures we've dreamed of—our own home, a maid for you, Nell, and no more worrying about the cost of living!

"The president called me in today and told me. He said he picked me for promotion three months ago when he learned I was studying at home with the International Correspondence Schools. Now my chance has come—and thanks to the I. C. S., I'm ready for it!"

Thousands of men now know the joy of happy, prosperous homes because they let the International Correspondence Schools prepare them in spare hours for bigger work and better pay. You will find them in offices, shops, stores, mills, mines, factories, on railroads, in the Army and Navy—everywhere.

Why don't *you* study some one thing and get ready for a real job, at a salary that will give *your* wife and children the things you would like them to have?

You can *do* it! Pick the position you want in the work you like best and the I. C. S. will prepare you for it right in your own home, in your spare time—you need not lose a day or a dollar from your present occupation.

Yes, you *can* do it! More than two million have done it in the last twenty-seven years. More than 100,000 are doing it right now. Without cost, without obligation, find out how you can join them. Mark and mail this coupon!

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Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

- ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting and Railways
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ Ship Draftsman
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Window Trimmer
- ☐ Show Card Writer
- ☐ Sign Painter
- ☐ Railroad Trainman
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer and Typist
- ☐ Cert. Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING
- ☐ Auto Repairing
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ French
- ☐ Italian

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. . . and at big hotels and clubs, East and West

A fact:

Sales reports from 8 leading cities—just as received at our main office during the last week in August:

ARMY and NAVY CLUB, Washington, D. C.:
"Fatima sells biggest—irrespective of price"

BELLEVUE-STRATFORD, Philadelphia:
"Fatima outsells all other cigarettes, except two 25-cent brands"

CONGRESS HOTEL, Chicago:
"Fatima is one of the leading sellers among the better brands"

HOTEL ASTOR, N. Y. City:
"We sell more Fatimas than any other cigarette"

HOTEL GIBSON, Cincinnati:
"Fatima leads all other brands in sales"

HOTEL SINTON, Cincinnati:
"More Fatimas are sold than any other cigarette"

HOTEL WILLARD, Washington, D. C.:
"Fatima is biggest-selling cigarette"

MARSHALL FIELD'S GENTLEMEN'S GRILL, Chicago:
"Fatima is as big if not a bigger seller than any of the other high-class brands"

MISSOURI ATHLETIC CLUB, St. Louis:
"Fatima still holds first place in sales"

OFFICERS' CLUB, West Point:
"More Fatimas smoked than any other cigarette"

RACQUET CLUB, St. Louis:
"Fatima is larg st seller"

THE PONCHARTRAIN, Detroit:
"Fatima is the second best-selling brand"

THE SHOREHAM, Washington, D. C.:
"With one exception, Fatima is best seller"

UNION CLUB, Cleveland:
"Fatima is one of the largest sellers"

FATIMA

A Sensible Cigarette

And Fatima gives full, honest value—instead of "showy" looks. It is for every smoker who wants a cigarette that never "talks back," even if a man should smoke more often than usual.

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.

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